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SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS
OF
SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

TRANSLATED FROM CONVERSATIONS AND
LETTERS IN BENGALI

Second Edition

SRI RAMAKRISHNA MATH
MYLAPORE, MADRAS
1933

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SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS
OF
SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

FOREWORD

Swami Brahmananda was one of the most eminent and one of the most beloved of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna—the first also to come to Him. Sri Ramakrishna regarded him as His own son and admitted him to the utmost intimacy. In this familiar daily intercourse the disciple caught the glint of the Master's effulgence. It shone through all he said, all he did, all he was. It gave him unlimited power and insight, and an authority no one thought to dispute. This last he used sparingly. He led rather by quiet appeal than by more insistent methods, but so mighty was his spiritual force that his gentlest suggestion was to those who heard it, a word of command.

It was my blessed privilege to be closely associated with the Swami during the six months of his first visit to Madras. When the present book of counsels was put into my hands to revise, edit and prepare for publication, there rose before my mind once again the picture of that majestic, yet child-like, figure moving in the twilight shadow up and down the dim monastery hall at Mylapore; once again his gentle voice sounded in my ears; once again the benediction of his loving presence fell in refreshing shower over my spirit. I have striven to let that voice sound unmuted through these pages; to leave unbarred the benediction of that presence.

The spiritual instructions which follow were spoken in largest measure at Benares, Kankhal, Belur, or elsewhere, in informal conversations. Some were written in personal letters. In the earlier days of the Swami's administration as President of the Ramakrishna Mission he remained nearly always in retirement at Puri, or at the Head Monastery of the Order on the Ganges above Calcutta. At that time he was reluctant to assume the place of teacher. At Madras, if any one asked him a question he would answer: "Go and ask Sasi Maharaj. He knows everything. I know nothing."

Later he emerged from his seclusion and became an active and stimulating visitor at the various Centres of the Mission. The teaching set down in the present volume belongs to this second period. It was preserved by devout disciples and published in the "Vedanta Kesari," the Official Magazine of the Mission's work at Madras. Carefully and reverently revised, it appears now in more permanent form.

The counsels given are pre-eminently practical. They are the spontaneous expression of the Swami's own wide vision and profound spiritual experience. Their power is irresistible. They transform and redeem. They kindle fresh ardour in the heart. They transmute life into living. Charged with a holy message they go forth now, bearing to world and cloister alike, the promise of spiritual achievement.

DEVAMATA

ANANDA-ASHRAMA,
LA CRESCENTA, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.
June, 1931.

CONVERSATIONS

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I

Meditation and Realisation (Conversation at Benares, 1921)

MEDITATION AND REALISATION

(CONVERSATION AT BENARES, 1921)

P—Maharaj, I am practising *Japam* and meditation, but I have not yet acquired any taste for these. Somehow or other I am struggling on. What must I do?

How to develop taste for Japam and meditation

THE SWAMI—Is it possible to have that taste in the beginning? No. Struggle hard to attain it. Concentrate all your energies on its achievement, and never for a moment pay heed to other matters. Apply yourself whole-heartedly to it and to it alone. Onward, onward! Never be satisfied with your present state of mind. Try to create within yourself a burning dissatisfaction. Say to yourself—"What progress am I making? Not a bit." Sri Ramakrishna used to say to the Divine Mother—"Mother, another day is gone and I have not seen Thee!"

Struggle hard

Every night before you go to bed, think for a while how much time you have spent in doing good deeds, how much again in doing useless things; how much time you have utilised in meditation and how much you have wasted in idleness. Make your mind strong through *Tapasya* (austerity) and *Brahmacharya* (continence).

Tapasya / austerity and Brahmacharya Continence

In rich men's houses they keep a *Darwan* (porter) whose duty is to prevent thieves, cows, sheep, etc., from entering the compound. The mind is man's *Darwan.* The stronger the mind becomes, the better. Mind has also been compared to a restive horse. Such a horse generally takes the rider along the wrong path. Only he who can hold a tight rein and check the horse can go the right way. Struggle, struggle on! What are you doing? Is everything achieved by the mere wearing of the *Gerua* cloth (ochre-coloured cloth of the *Sannyasin*) or by renunciation of hearth and home? What have you realised? Time is flying. Do not waste a single moment. You will be able to work hard only another three or four years at the most. Afterwards both body and mind will become weak and infirm and you will not be able to do anything. What can be achieved without diligence?

You are thinking, "Let us first of all have yearning, faith and devotion; then we shall do our *Sadhana* (spiritual practices)." Is that possible? Can we see the day without the break of dawn? When the Lord comes, love, devotion and faith follow Him as His retinue.

Can anything be achieved without *Tapasya?* Brahma at first heard—"*Tapas* (meditate), *Tapas* (meditate), *Tapas* (meditate)." Do you not see what a severe *Tapasya* even the *Avataras* (Incarnations of God) had to perform? Has anybody gained anything without labour? Buddha, Sankara and others—what tremendous austerities they practised in their lives! What burning renunciation they possessed! What severe *Sadhana* they performed!

Real faith is attained only after GOD realisation

Real faith cannot be had in the beginning. First realisation, then faith. But at first the *Sadhaka*

First faith / blind faith to some great soul

(aspirant) has to pin his faith—"blind faith" it may be—to the precepts of his *Guru* (spiritual teacher) or of some great soul; then only can he advance toward the goal.

Do you not know the parable of the oyster as told by Sri Ramakrishna? The oyster floats about on the surface of the sea with its shell wide open, just for a little drop of the Swati-rain (rain falling when the star Swati or Arcturus is in the ascendant). As soon as it gets a rain drop, it dives down to the ocean-bed and there forms a fine pearl. Like the oyster, you too should be up and doing and then dive deep into the ocean of meditation.

You have no self-reliance. Personal exertion is an indispensable factor for success in the spiritual life. Do something for a period of at least four years. Then if you do not make any tangible progress, come and take me to task.

Japam and meditation are impossible unless you transcend the limitations of *Rajas* (excessive activity) and *Tamas* (inertia or lethargy). Afterwards, you have to rise even above *Sattwa* (illumination) and attain the high spiritual plane from where there is no return.

How difficult is the attainment of a human birth! Yet it is only in this human birth that God-realisation is possible. Strive hard in this life and reach that state from which you will not have to come back.

Mind to be raised step by step from gross to subtle to causal to Great cause

The mind is to be raised, step by step, from the gross state to the subtle, then to the causal state, still further to the Great Cause (*Mahakarana*) and finally to *Samadhi* (highest illumination). Resign yourself fully to the Lord. He is everything. There is nothing besides. सर्वं खल्विदं ब्रह्म ?? "Verily all this is Brahman." Everything is His and His only. Never be calculating. Is self-surrender possible in a day? When that is achieved, everything is achieved. One must struggle hard for it.

Life is eternal. The span of man's life is at most a hundred years. Give up the pleasures of these hundred years, if you want to enjoy eternal life and, with it, eternal bliss.

II

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

(CONVERSATION AT BENARES)

THE SWAMI—Are your religious practices going well?

S—No, Maharaj. With all my efforts I see no spiritual unfoldment; hence I find no peace of mind. Evidently we are born with evil *Samskaras* (impressions) and these stand in the way of our spiritual progress.

THE SWAMI—My boy, you should not think thus. Practise *Japam* at dead of night. If you cannot do it at that time, do it during the early hours of the morning. Perform *Purascharana**. Do not waste your valuable time any more. Lose yourself in prayer and meditation. All inner truths will come by themselves, if you practise *Sadhana* for some time.

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*Usually it implies regular *Japam* or the repetition of the name of the Deity a prescribed number of times, followed by *Homa* and other ceremonies. Additional *Japam* is also permissible in place of these ceremonies.

The spiritual aspirant should not take much food at night. At first take three-fourths of your usual diet. Then reduce the quantity to half. In the beginning you may feel some weakness of the body. But the body will be all right after some time, and will remain active and in perfect condition.

(The Swami then referred to the days when he practised Sadhana in the company of his brother-disciples and said: "We used to take only a single meal during the whole day and night.")

THE SWAMI—A *Sadhaka* should first learn about the spiritual path from some great soul, then follow it methodically. If he does it haphazard, he cannot achieve much success. Again if he gives it up, he will have to put forth double the usual effort to gain the desired result. But no endeavour is lost. Lust, anger, greed, gradually go away from him who leads the spiritual life.

Lust, anger and greed gradually goes away

Your mind is now covered over by *Rajas* (activity) and *Tamas* (inertia). It must be made pure and subtle, and raised to the state of *Sattwa* (illumination). Then you will find pleasure in religious practices and will also feel inclined to devote more and more time to them. Later on, when the mind attains perfect purity, you will naturally devote yourself to spiritual culture. The mind is at present on the gross plane. Consequently it leans toward gross things. But when it becomes awakened, it inclines naturally toward the spiritual. When it grows subtler, its capacity also increases and the aspirant is able to understand within a short time the truths about God.

When you sit in meditation, first think of a blissful Divine form. This will have a soothing effect on your nerves and mind. Otherwise meditation will become dry and tedious. Think of the form of your *Ishtam* (Ideal) as smiling and full of bliss.

While away your time no longer. Now the senses are strong and must be kept under control. This is no doubt a troublesome task. But practise *Sadhana* continuously for seven or eight years, then you will enjoy the fruits of your practices, the peace and bliss thereof. Many women devotees have attained spiritual illumination. Should you not also strive for it? But women have greater faith than men. That is why they succeed in a comparatively short time.

Lord is always with you

Believe me, the Lord is always with you. If you practise a little, He will extend His helping hand to you. It is He who is protecting us all from miseries and troubles. How unbounded is His grace! How can I describe it to you?

You have been only hearing of all these spiritual things. Now realise them. You have done enough study and reasoning. Now do some spiritual practice. First take up that aspect of God which appeals to you most. Follow your own path of *Sadhana.* When you realise God through it, you will feel the joy of realising Him also in other aspects and through other paths.

One should meditate on the form of the *Ishtam* along with *Japam.* Otherwise *Japam* does not become effective. If you cannot think of the whole form, think only of a part. Begin your meditation on the "lotus feet" of the Deity. Continue to do it even if you fail in the beginning. Why should you stop until you succeed? Succeed you must. Practice will make everything easy.

Meditation is next only to Samadhi

Is meditation an easy affair? Remember, it is next only to *Samadhi.* Try to leave everything to the Lord. Resign yourself wholly unto Him. Then, through your *Sadhana,* self-surrender and everything will come from within.

III

WORSHIP AND MEDITATION

(CONVERSATION AT BENARES)

K—Maharaj, you spoke to us of the practice of *Puja* (worship), meditation, continence and study of the Scriptures. What does *Puja* mean?

What is Puja / Worship

THE SWAMI—*Puja* means both external and mental worship. In external worship certain accessories such as flowers, incense, and water are necessary. It is difficult to get these things always. So mental worship is more convenient for you. After worshipping the *Ishtam* (Chosen Ideal) mentally with *Padya* (water for washing the feet), flowers and incense, which are offered in external worship, practise meditation and mental *Japam*. In purely mental *Japam* the *Mantram* (name of the Deity) is to be repeated without moving the lips. But in ordinary *Japam* one has to utter the

Mental Japam without moving lips

Mantram and there is therefore movement of the lips.*

In meditation you should think of the form of your *Ishtam* as effulgent. Imagine that everything is shining through its lustre. Think of this effulgence as non-material and possessed with intelligence. This kind of meditation will later on develop into meditation on the formless and infinite aspect of God. In the beginning the aspirant has to take the help of imagination; later on, when he develops his spiritual sense, he will feel the presence of the Divine. Next, when he gets the highest spiritual vision, he will come face to face with Truth. He is then transported into a different realm altogether, of which this world of matter appears to be a mere shadow and, as such, something unreal. The mind is then lost in *Savikalpa Samadhi* (superconscious vision with thought). Next comes *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* (superconscious vision without thought). There is then the reali-

Savikalpaka vs Nirvikalpaka samadhi

**Japam* may be (i) loud, that is, audible to all, (ii) (a) audible to oneself only, or (b) silent but with the movement of the lips, and (iii) mental without any movement of the lips.

sation of that which is beyond thought and speech. In this state there is nothing to be seen; nothing to be heard. Everything is lost in the Infinite.

When one attains to this state, one can bring down the mind only with great effort to the world of phenomena, which appear to be unreal. It is द्वैताद्वैत - विवर्जित "beyond duality and non-duality. Some persons attaining to this state look upon the body as an obstacle in the way of unbroken spiritual experience, and cast it off in *Samadhi*. It is like the breaking of an earthen jar.

Anecdote on Nirvikalpaka samadhi - like breaking the last pot with water which reflected sun

Sri Ramakrishna used to give a beautiful illustration to explain the highest state of spiritual realisation. Suppose there are nine pots full of water, the sun reflected in each one. You break the pots one after another until only one is left, with the sun reflected in it; finally even this last pot is broken. Then whatever is, is there. It can neither be seen nor described.

Meditation of Ishta i.e. choosen deity as all pervading spirit

K—Maharaj, some think of the *Ishtam* as the all-pervading Spirit. Is this not also a form of meditation?

Ishta is with form and without form

THE SWAMI—Yes, quite so. Everyone has to practise this meditation but only after making some progress in spiritual life; not in the beginning. The presence of the *Ishtam* is to be realised everywhere. He who is personal and with form is also impersonal and without form. He dwells in every being. He prevades land and water, hills and dales, sky and stars,—everything.

Service to Guru / spiritual guide

K—Maharaj, the Scriptures speak of service to the *Guru* as a necessary means to spiritual realisation. How far is this true?

Mind becomes Guru afterwards

THE SWAMI—It is necessary at the preliminary stage. But afterwards one's mind itself plays the part of the *Guru.**

Guru is not ordinary human being

The *Guru* should not be looked upon as an ordinary human being. His physical body is the temple in which resides the Lord. If the *Guru* is served with this idea in mind, one comes to acquire love and devotion for him, which can then be directed toward the Lord.

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*The guidance of God—the *Guru of Gurus,* dwelling within—comes through one's purified mind.

Guru and Ishta are not different

There are *Sadhakas* (aspirants) who meditate upon the *Guru* in the *Sahasrara* (thousand-petalled lotus in the brain), and next they merge the form of the *Guru* into that of the *Ishtam.* Sri Ramakrishna used to say very clearly:—"The *Guru* appears before the disciple in his spiritual vision; then pointing out the *Ishtam* to him he says, 'Look, there is your *Ishtam,*' and loses himself in it." Really the *Guru* is not different from the *Ishtam.* There are so many practices in the spiritual life. How can I tell you about all of them?

Follow the spiritual path in right earnest. When the mind becomes pure through religious practices you will understand all the truths of the spiritual world. Remember, there is no end to them; they are countless. The spiritual aspirant remains wholly absorbed in them.

Q—If the *Sadhaka* gets a little taste of *Ananda* (Divine bliss), he is very much encouraged to proceed on his spiritual path. Is this not so?

THE SWAMI—True. But in the higher spiritual state there is neither bliss nor sorrow, pain nor

Ananda for spiritual practice, once it is over it is not required

pleasure, existence nor non-existence. The *Ananda* that you speak of is only a help during the period of *Sadhana.* The boat stands in need of a favourable wind so long as it has not reached its destination. But when it has once reached it there is no need for wind, whether favourable or unfavourable. *Ananda* helps the aspirant in his onward course like the favourable wind.

Prama, Prameya and Pramata vanishes when Absolute is attained,beyond this no one can express

Knowledge, the object known and the knower,—all three lose themselves in the Absolute;—so much only have the Scriptures been able to say. But what takes place after this, none has the power to describe. One has to realise it for oneself through spiritual practice.

How wonderful is Infinite Existence—where there is neither want nor fear. The very thought of it elevates the soul. There are some spiritual

Some realise Absolute / Nitya as distinct from Relative / Lila; some look upon both of these as one and same

men who realise the Absolute (*Nitya*) as distinct from the Relative (*Lila,* Divine Sport). Others look upon both of these as one and the same.

There is another state of spiritual experience, which is beyond both Absolute and Relative

There is yet another state of spiritual experience, which is beyond both Absolute and Relative.

IV

The Kundalini

THE KUNDALINI

(CONVERSATION AT BENARES)

Q—Maharaj, how can the *Kundalini** be awakened?

How to awaken Kundalini

THE SWAMI—Through the practice of *Japam* (repetition of the Lord's name), *Dhyana* (meditation) and other spiritual exercises. According to some Yogis there are special forms of meditation and practices which awaken it, but I believe it can be best done through *Japam* and *Dhyana*. The practice of *Japam* is specially suited to our present iron age (Kali Yuga). There is no other spiritual practice easier than this. But meditation must accompany the repetition of the *Mantram*.

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*Lit. *coiled*. It is described in the Tantras as a coiled serpent sleeping in the human body. *Kundalini* is the spiritual power latent in all beings. With its awakening begins the real religious life of the aspirant. According to the Yogis there exists in the spinal column a hollow canal called *Sushumna* with seven lotuses or centres. These centres begin with the *Muladhara* or the centre at the base of the spinal column, and end in the *Sahasrara* or the thousand-petalled lotus in the brain. As the *Kundalini* rises higher and higher, wonderful psychic powers and spiritual visions come to the Yogi. When it reaches the *Sahasrara* the Yogi attains the highest spiritual illumination.

Q—Does meditation mean thinking of the form of the Deity?

THE SWAMI—It implies thinking of the Divine, both with form and without form.

Q—Maharaj, is it the *Guru* who decides whether one is fit for meditation on God with form or without form?

THE SWAMI—Yes. But the pure mind itself plays the part of the *Guru*. At times the mind is inclined to think of the form. At other times the formless aspect of God appeals. The outer *Guru* cannot be had always. As the aspirant goes on with his spiritual practices, his power of comprehension also increases. Then his mind can act as a guide.

The Yogavasishtha-Ramayana says that mental energy is wasted through various distractions. A part of it is drawn to the body, another part to the senses, still another part to the objects of sense.

The mind is tied to many things. Snap all the bonds. Collect the scattered forces of the mind and make them flow in a particular direction. This is the task of the spiritual life.

Concentrate the whole mind and direct it to spiritual practices until the goal is reached. Strive. Be up and doing. You are young now. This is the time to practise spiritual exercises. You will not be able to do anything when you grow old. In the beginning it is necessary to do some spiritual exercises as part of the daily routine. Whether the mind likes it or not, these must be followed regularly.

Begin your spiritual life in right earnest. If you can concentrate all the distracted powers of the mind, you will find that this will generate a tremendous energy. Do it through *Japam* or through meditation or through discrimination. Know that all these means are equally effective. Take up any one and merge yourself in *Sadhana*. Do not question any more. First do something; then come and ask questions, if you have any.

Q—Maharaj, is it true that the *Kundalini* awakens by the grace of the *Guru?*

THE SWAMI—Through the grace of the *Guru* not only can the *Kundalini* be roused, but everything else can be had,—even the knowledge of Brahman. But this grace cannot be attained easily. One has to strive one's utmost to get it.

Ask the mind in your calm moments if you have done any spiritual practice. It will tell you that you have done absolutely nothing. Practise some spiritual discipline. Begin now. Devote yourself to this and this alone. Do not pay heed to anything else. Plunge into the very depth of your soul.

V

WORK AND WORSHIP

(CONVERSATION AT BENARES)

THE SWAMI—How are you getting on with your spiritual practices?

S—Maharaj, I do not find enough time for them. There is too much work to do.

THE SWAMI—It is a mistake to think that *Sadhana* (spiritual exercises) cannot be practised for want of time. The real cause is the restlessness of the mind.

Work and worship must go hand in hand. It is very good if one can devote oneself solely to spiritual practices. But how many can do it? Two types of men can sit still doing nothing. One is the idiot, who is too dull to be active. The other is the saint who has gone beyond all activity. As the Gita says, "Without performing work none can reach worklessness." One can attain knowledge merely through the discipline of work. As we see, even those who give up work and lead a retired life have to spend a good deal of their time in putting up thatches, cooking food and doing other things.

Instead of working for yourself, work for the sake of the Lord. Know that all the work you have to do is Sri Ramakrishna's and Swami Vivekananda's. If you can work with this idea, your work will not bind you. On the other hand, it will improve you in every way, spiritually, morally, intellectually and also physically. Offer your body and soul at the feet of these great teachers. Give yourself up wholly to them; be their servant and tell them, "I give you my body, soul and all I have. Do with them what you will; I am ready to serve you to the best of my power." If you can do this, the responsibility of your spiritual welfare rests with them. You need not bother about yourself any more. But you should resign yourself in the right spirit. You should not do it with a doubting heart "taking the name of God and at the same time keeping your clothes untouched by water*."

We led a wandering life for five or six years and then set ourselves to work. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) called me aside one day and said, "There is nothing in a wandering life. Work for the sake of the Lord." We did various kinds of work, but I do not think it did us any harm. Rather, it did us great good. But we had strong faith in Swamiji's words. I tell you, you must have infinite faith in these two great souls, Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, and work for their cause. Do not be afraid. Keep your faith firm. Hereafter many will try to shake your faith by saying, "The work you have taken up has nothing to do with Sri Ramakrishna or Swamiji." But pay no heed to them. Even if the whole world stands against you, never give up what you have once believed to be true.

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*This reference is to Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the milk-maid and the Brahmin priest. A milk-maid used to supply milk to a Brahmin priest living on the other side of a river. Owing to the irregularities of boat service, she could not deliver the milk punctually every day. Once being rebuked for her delay the poor woman said, "What can I do, Sir? I have to wait a long time for the boatman." The priest said, "Woman! people cross the ocean of life by uttering the name of God, and canst thou not cross this little river?" The simple-hearted woman believed the priest. And from the next day she began to cross the river uttering God's name. One day the priest asked her why she was never late as before. The woman replied, "I cross the river by uttering the name of the Lord as you bade me do." The priest could not believe this, and wanted to see himself how the woman crossed the river. The woman took him with her and began to walk over the water repeating the name of the Lord. But looking behind, she saw the priest following timidly, holding up his clothes. "How is it, Sir," she said, "you are uttering the name of the Lord, but at the same time you are trying to keep your clothes untouched by water? You do not fully rely on the Lord." Complete resignation and absolute faith in God are at the root of all miracles.

S—It is very difficult to devote oneself exclusively to spiritual practices. I tried but could not continue for a long time.

THE SWAMI—Why do you think that you cannot do it, because you failed once or twice? One has to try again and again. Sri Ramakrishna used to say—"The new-born calf tries to stand up, but falls down many times. It does not stop. It tries again and again. And then at last, it not only stands up, but also learns to run." The mind gets good training if one takes up some regular work at the beginning of the spiritual life. Then the trained mind can be applied to meditation and other spiritual practices. The mind that is allowed to drift will drift at the time of spiritual practices also.

To the spiritually advanced man there comes a time when he wants to devote himself solely to meditation and prayer. At that time work falls off from him by itself. This takes place when the mind awakens spiritually. Otherwise, even if one takes to a life of exclusive spiritual practice by sheer effort of the will, one can go on only for a few days. Then comes monotony. Some even go mad by persisting. Others follow the spiritual path in a haphazard way, and keep their mind busy with other things as well.

Great strength can be acquired through the practice of *Brahmacharya* (continence and service). A true *Brahmacharin* can do the work of twenty-five men. In olden days, besides the practice of continence, *Brahmacharya* included *Japam* (repetition of the Lord's name), meditation, study of the Scriptures, pilgrimage, association with holy men, and even more.

All men cannot know what is good for them. For that reason one should keep the company of holy men. Here I give you full freedom. Let me see how long you can follow the right path. Not long —not more than a few days.

All troubles arise because the mind is not properly trained. There is no enemy more harmful than idle gossip. It ruins one completely.

Unless one spends some time in solitude, one cannot understand the workings of the mind and realise the Truth. It is very difficult to grow spiritually along any particular line in the midst of tumult and confusion.

I give freedom to all. I want everybody to advance along his own line. But when I find that he is not able to do so, I come to his help.

It is good in every way to stay at a particular place and take up some form of service. You will feel uneasy if you stay here for a long time without doing any work useful to the institution. But if you render some form of service every day, you will feel right in both mind and body.

During the days of our active life, we used to be in high spirits and keep excellent health too. I think we used to feel much better then than now when we do not do any regular work. I am telling you my innermost thoughts—what I actually feel. I have now retired from active work. I speak of myself just by way of illustration. Some people think they, too, should do like me and be less active. Never entertain such a thought.

Eternal life is before you. What if you devote a few lives to the cause of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji? Even if it is a mistake to do so, let a few lives be spent in vain. But I tell you, it is not going to be so. Through the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, you will see to what great spiritual heights you will soar.

Do not lead an easy-going life any more. If you do, you will not be able to practise spiritual exercises properly. Any work that you take up, do with your whole heart. This is the secret of work, as Swamiji used to say. Set yourself to work. You are now required to conduct a magazine. Do it by all means. It is nothing to you, it is very easy for you.

Before you begin to work, remember the Lord and offer your salutations to Him. Do the same at intervals in the course of the work, and also after you finish it. Spend all your time in thinking of the life, teachings and commandments of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. Know in your heart of hearts that the work you do is for their sake.

VI

HAPPINESS

(CONVERSATION AT BENARES)

THE SWAMI—Do you know why I ask you seriously, all of you, to devote yourselves heart and soul to the Lord? When we were of your age, Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) used to push us and make us do our spiritual practices. In boyhood the mind remains plastic like clay. It receives an indelible impression from whatever it comes in contact with. So long as clay remains soft, you can give it any shape you like. But when the clay is burned, this cannot be done. Your mind now is like unburnt clay. It can be moulded in any way you want. It is still pure and untainted, so it can be directed very easily toward God. If the mind is kept wholly occupied with thoughts of the Lord from this time on, no foreign thought can disturb it. If the mind be now firmly fixed on the Divine, you need have no anxiety about your spiritual progress.

The mind is like a packet of mustard seeds. If the seeds are once scattered, it is very difficult to gather them up. So I ask you to mould your mind before its energy becomes scattered. When you grow old and the energy of your mind has been frittered away, you will have to make very strenuous efforts to concentrate it; you will experience tremendous difficulty when you try to focus it on a particular object. Do you not see how impressionable is the mind of a little boy? You are now like him. If you want to mould yourselves, strive for it earnestly from your sixteenth to your thirtieth year. After that there is less chance of achieving illumination. Up to the thirtieth year the body and the mind remain fresh. That is the time when the mind can be given a definite shape. But you must labour hard and devote yourselves heart and soul to your ideal of life. Whatever impression the mind may receive during youth will last throughout life. If therefore you have determined to lead a holy life in order to realise God, strive your utmost from today. Your health is all right now. The mind also is plastic. This is the time for spiritual practices. Mould your mind through constant struggle. If this period of your life goes by, it will be more difficult to do anything afterwards.

If you can leave a strong stamp on the mind during this period, if you can make God the be-all and end-all of your existence, if you can devote yourselves sincerely to realise Him, you will be free from all sorrow and pain. No misery, no unhappiness will be able to throw you off your balance. You will become the inheritor of everlasting bliss and joy divine.

What does man want? He wants happiness. How he runs after it! What plans he makes! What strenuous efforts he puts forth! But does he get it? After many attempts, after many a plan, he is baffled. He plans again and again, but to no purpose. In this way his whole life ebbs away. He has not the good fortune to enjoy peace and happiness at all. He toils hard like an ordinary labourer and in return reaps sorrow and pain. Then he departs from this world. Thus he lives and dies in vain. Nothing better can be expected by one who runs after empty pleasures, forgetting the goal of life.

If you wish to attain real happiness, you must sacrifice all worldly pleasures, all attachment for fleeting joys, and direct the whole energy of your mind toward God. The more you advance toward Him, the greater the bliss you will realise. The more your mind becomes attached to the world and to sense-enjoyments, the more will you suffer.

Do you know the nature of the ordinary man? He seeks only pleasure, joy and diversion. And he makes this mistake from the very beginning. Ninety-nine per cent of those who seek happiness do not know what it really is. They grasp at whatever they find near at hand and believe they have got the thing they seek. Then when they are disappointed, they take up something else; and when again they fail, they bemoan their lot. But see the folly of it;—they are disappointed again and again; still they will not change their course, they will not take up the right path. They pass their lives receiving blow after blow and bewailing their destiny. Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) used to compare them to a camel. The camel will not take good grass even when close by. It knows well that thorny grass makes the mouth bleed, but still it insists on eating it. In the same way man suffers because of wrong thoughts and wrong desires.

You are boys—very young boys. Your mind has not yet received any evil impression from the outside world. If you can struggle hard from now on, you will be able to escape life's sorrows and miseries.

Whatever the riches you may possess, whatever your chances of living a happy and prosperous life, however wide your circle of friends and well-wishers, you will not have real happiness. All these things last for a few moments, or at the most an hour; they do not last longer. Then comes a reaction of misery. Thus reaction follows action. If one is to attain true and eternal happiness, one must aspire after that joy which brings no reaction in its train. Wherein lies that true and eternal happiness? It lies in realising God. This divine enjoyment alone brings no reaction; all other kinds of enjoyments you can name are followed by reaction. And you must know that wherever there is reaction, there is sorrow and suffering.

Never forget the ideal of human life. This life is not given us to while away in eating, drinking and sleeping like an animal, in idle gossip and such things. When you have been born as a human being, spurn all worldly enjoyments. Firmly resolve to realise God and attain infinite bliss. Flinch not, even if you die in the attempt.

Why have you come away from your hearth and home in the name of our Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna)? Is it not to realise Him, to get rid of the sorrows and sufferings of the world and attain everlasting peace and happiness?

Sincerely struggle then toward the ideal of life, so long as you have strength of body and mind. By no means relax your efforts, saying that you will realise the ideal later or that it will be possible only through the Lord's grace. It is idlers alone that talk in this way. I do not want you to idle away your time. If you are not in earnest, speak out clearly. Say, "I have a desire to enjoy worldly pleasures. I have not a sincere longing to realise Truth—to attain God." Let your speech and your thought be one.

When are you going to do spiritual practices? The best part of life, as I told you, is from the sixteenth to the thirtieth year. Do you hope that after wasting these valuable years in useless pursuits, you will be able to take up spiritual practices in old age? Know that is cheating, deceiving oneself. Do not cheat yourselves.

VII

WORLDLY LIFE AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

(CONVERSATION AT THE BELUR MATH)

THE SWAMI—Most people waste their life in trivial concerns; then when old age overtakes them, many who are in service retire on pensions and spend their last days at some place of pilgrimage. They think that thus they will attain *Bhakti* (devotion) and *Mukti* (liberation). They hope also that the *Tirthas* (places of pilgrimage) will enable them to expiate all the sins they have committed. Is it not sheer madness to think thus? What else can it be? He who firmly believes in the purifying power of the *Tirthas* will, no doubt, receive some spiritual impetus therefrom. The *Tirthas* are always pure and holy, and those who have good *Samskaras* (tendencies) are somewhat benefited by them spiritually. That is all. Nothing more can be expected from them. Benares, however, has to be considered an exception. Many people, for this reason, are anxious to spend there the last days of their life. They entertain the firm hope that they will attain liberation if they pass away in that sacred city. True it is that a man is freed from the bonds of *Samsara* (birth and death) if he breathes his last at Benares. Viswanath* is the Lord of the Universe, and strange and inscrutable are His ways.

Is it desirable to live a life in misery and suffering and then attain *Mukti* (liberation)? Is it not wiser to enjoy the present life in the ecstasy of devotion and spiritual practice and then once for all enter the portals of infinite bliss? As Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) used to say, "You can enter a house through its front gate or through its back door." But which of these is better? When it is possible to gain entrance through the front gate, why should we enter through the back door? Decide now which of these two you should choose—momentary happiness or infinite bliss, the pleasures of this life or the everlasting peace of the life beyond?

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*Lit. Lord of the Universe, a name for Shiva who, as the devotee believes, confers the highest knowledge and salvation to those who die in the holy city of Benares.

One great thing to be considered is *Kripa* (Divine grace). The breeze of His grace is always blowing. Only unfurl your sails and you will have it. How can you catch the breeze if you keep your sails furled? Hoist them now and do not delay any longer. Give up your desires for worldly enjoyments, your hankering for name and fame, and fully resign yourself to the Lord. It is quite impossible to enjoy worldly pleasures and at the same time realise God. You cannot serve both God and mammon at the same time. If you want to realise God, you must renounce worldly pleasures. If, on the other hand, you desire to enjoy temporal pleasures, you will have to give up God. Do not keep your feet in two boats, as they say. If you do, you will only make yourself miserable. You must have a clear conception of your life's ideal. Decide now what life you want to lead. Should it be this fleeting life of transient pleasures or the everlasting life of eternal bliss?

You are young boys, innocent and guileless. Worldliness has not yet left its impress on your mind. If you will be up and doing now, you can escape from the clutches of the trials and tribulations of worldly life. See that your principles are fixed even now. If it is not done now, it will never be done. Mere skipping on the surface will be of no avail. Hold to your ideal; hold fast, and never loosen your grip. To the man who has accepted God as the be-all and end-all of life, who has forsaken all desires and cravings for sensual enjoyments—to him God is very near. Such a man binds God with the ties of his love as Yasoda and the Gopis did Gopal.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He who has denied himself for the sake of God has a strong and undisputed claim on Him." As one can endearingly demand anything of one's parents or one's near relations, so a devotee has a right to ask God, "Lord, appear before me. Will you not come? You must come." When a devotee is earnest, God cannot remain unmoved. He hastens to him and takes him on His lap. Oh, how inexpressible that joy! How boundless that bliss! He alone knows it who has had that supreme experience. Compared to it, worldly pleasures, so dear to most people, become insipid and worthless.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "He who has totally given up carnal enjoyments for the sake of God has already covered three-fourths of his journey." Is it easy to renounce all enjoyments? Only if a man has God's grace and has done severe *Tapas* (spiritual discipline) in his past life, can he acquire the strength required for renunciation. Purify your mind in such a way that vile thoughts may not arise in it at all.

You are all *Brahmacharins* (unmarried). You will not marry, you have pledged your life to God, sacrificing pleasures, enjoyments and all for His sake. But bear in mind that it is very hard to lead a pure and unsullied life. It is not so easy as you young boys take it to be. Do you know what it is like? It is like walking on the edge of a drawn sword. Every moment there is the chance of a fall, of being sliced to pieces. Perfect continence is the only condition of success in this life. And it is difficult, nay impossible, to practise absolute purity without love and faith in God. You have to live in a world full of passions and enjoyments. Every day you have to see before you more than ninety-nine per cent of the people running mad after sensual pleasures; there is constant risk of your mind being contaminated with evil thoughts. If your mind becomes tainted by them, there is no hope for you. Those who want to lead a life of *Brahmacharya* (continence) must always engage their minds in thinking good thoughts, studying good books and in discussing elevating subjects. They must spend their time in worship of God, service of holy men, in the company of pious people, and in the practice of meditation and other kinds of spiritual discipline. This is the only way to mould one's character.

First of all, be firm in your devotion to the practice of *Brahmacharya* (continence). Everything else will come by itself. Perfection in continence cannot be attained without *Sadhana* (spiritual practices); and without perfect continence, realisation of God is impossible. Unless God is realised, real bliss cannot be had, and without real happiness, human life will be spent in vain. You are all young boys—with pure minds and noble aspirations. I beg of you, my dear ones, do a little *Sadhana* and you will see how *Shraddha* (faith) and *Bhakti* (devotion) will be roused within you. You will become heirs of immortal bliss; you will be blessed with the vision of your *Ishtam* (Chosen Ideal), with the vision of God. You will then attain to the ultimate goal of human life.

VIII

REALISATION THROUGH SELF-SURRENDER

'AT THE BELUR MATH,

THE SWAMI—Sri Ramakrishna used to say that a person can attain God if he possesses the intensity of this threefold love—the love a devoted wife bears her husband, the attraction a worldly man feels for the world, and the attachment the miser has for his hoarded gold. Intense yearning of this kind is sure to enable one to realise God. Do you know what it means? It means that one can reach the Lord and be blessed with His vision and spiritual touch the moment the mind is cleansed of all desires and filled with a sincere longing for God-realisation. The Lord says in the Gita—

सर्व धर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।

"Relinquishing all individual effort, take refuge in Me alone."

Self-surrender, self-surrender, self-surrender—

that is the only way; there is no other. In this iron age (Kali Yuga) man depends too much on food and is shortlived. He has to do many things in this brief span of life. He possesses very little of the energy, strength, renunciation, courage and spirit of penance, that are essential for God-realisation. His mind is weak and naturally runs after enjoyment. But in spite of all this, God has to be realised. Without God-realisation life is vain; one comes into the world and goes out of it without accomplishing anything worthy. Man must therefore realise God, and there is no path easier than self-surrender.

What do we understand by self-surrender? Does it mean that we have not to do anything,—that we have only to sit quiet? No, it does not mean that. The devotee has to pray constantly with a pure heart in this manner,—"Oh Lord! I do not know what is good and what is bad for me. I am solely dependent on Thee. Grant unto me all that I need for spiritual life. Take me along the path that will bring me the greatest good. Vouchsafe unto me the faith and strength constantly to remember Thee and meditate on Thee."

It is indeed no easy thing to dedicate oneself heart and soul to the Lord. Many people say: "I have surrendered myself, my all, to God. I am doing as He is making me do." But if we observe their life, we shall see that their actions are quite contrary to what they profess. If they do anything good, they take the credit to themselves, feel highly elated over it, and think: "Oh, what a great thing I have achieved!" But when even a slight trouble besets them, they immediately throw the blame on the Lord, saying: "What a great misfortune He is bringing on me!" This is how most people spend life.

We judge men only by their exterior, but God looks into their innermost mind. God runs to him who prays with a sincere heart. Know this as certain. Be pure in heart. Let not your words be different from your thoughts and God will reward you according to your deserts.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say—"If you do one-sixteenth part of the *Sadhana* (spiritual practices) that I have done, it is enough." He has made *Sadhana* so very easy for us. But we are so indolent that we shirk our work and fail in our duty. By doing so we cheat ourselves. If some one gives us good things to eat, we want them to be put into our mouths. There are many who request me to bless them. I cannot help laughing to myself when I hear them. They do not do as I instruct them. The moment they leave my presence, they do whatever they like. If I should ask any one of them whether he follows my instructions, he would reply, "No, Sir, I had no time to do it," or "Weak and evil-minded as I am, I was not able to do it." Those who have no sincere desire to follow me and have no faith in me may do anything they like without asking me. They will not follow my instructions and yet they want to be blessed by me. They wish to attain spiritual realisation without the necessary exertion, by mere dodging. When such people come, I while away the time in aimless talk—in jesting and making fun. What is the use of tiring myself by talking of spiritual practices to people who will not follow them? I speak of higher matters only to a very few who, I think, will take my words and act on them. But even then they do not follow the instructions fully and properly. Always accustomed to shirking work, they want to attain everything without effort.

There is no dearth of Divine grace. The trouble is that men do not care to avail themselves of it. They take pleasure in idle gossip only. No one wants to realise the Supreme Truth. Man takes pride in talking nonsense; that is how he spends his life. And as he sows, so he reaps. "Teachers can be had by thousands, but rare indeed is a true disciple." There are many to take up the role of teachers, but where are the men to hear and follow their teachings? If one goes on striving for a higher life, with strong faith in the words of the *Guru,* then there is an end to one's miseries. He who has such faith need not run about here and there with a restless mind. The Lord looks to all his wants. He takes him by the hand and leads him along the right path. There need be no anxiety for him who has been blessed by the Lord.

It is given only to one in a million to cherish noble desires and sublime thoughts, and of such souls as are so privileged very few can stick to their ideals to the last. Those persons in whose mind good thoughts have already sprung up should try their utmost to strengthen and make them permanent. In order to keep up their fervour they should pray unceasingly to the Almighty, "Vouchsafe unto me, O Lord, Thy grace! May it be on me forever!" Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "To all appearances the maid-servant in a house looks upon all that belongs to her master as her own, but in her heart of hearts she knows that they do not belong to her at all. So long as we live, we must do our work without attachment. We should know in our heart of hearts that this world is not our permanent home, but only a temporary abode. And we should direct our mind to God, the heavenly home from where we came.

How many care for Truth or God? Puffed up with pride, man sometimes raises himself on such a high pedestal that he totally denies even the existence of God. Everyone thinks himself infallible and his way the only way to salvation. Do you know what such a one says? "We do not accept what we cannot understand." He little thinks how limited is his power of comprehension! What he thinks right today, he gives up as false tomorrow. Thus his opinion changes from day to day. In making a parade of his knowledge, he does not care a straw for what is high and noble. The Divine Mother alone knows in how many ways man is deluded.

Every person conceives of God in his own little individual way. But our conception of the Lord should not be so limited, for He is all-comprehensive. He is not perceptible to the mind and intellect. That one alone can realise God's nature, to whom He is pleased to reveal His mysteries. And when He is realised, the gates of knowledge are opened, the knots of the heart are cut asunder and infinite wisdom is attained. Only when man realises this state, can he fully understand the relation between God and himself—that the Lord is his own and he is the Lord's.

Man cannot attain any knowledge unless the Mother reveals it. The mysteries of this world and the next will be revealed only when She discloses them out of Her mercy. The intellect, as ordinarily understood, is not the real intellect. Its area, its range, is very limited. Those who want to gain real bliss in this life, those who really desire to solve its intricate problems—"Who am I?" "What have I come here for?" "Why am I suffering from so much misery?" "Why does one man attain to God-hood and another remain a mere brute?"—those who desire answers to these problems have one and only one duty,—to strive to realise God by all possible means. Life's perplexing problems will be solved the moment He is realised.

Children find joy in turning round a pillar, holding on to it firmly. Do you know where their attention is fixed? It is on the pillar; for they know full well that if they loosen their grip, they will fall down and be injured. So first of all hold fast to the Pillar of life, then you may go on circling round it as many times as you like. There will be no fear of falling down. Our first and foremost duty in life is to realise God. Know that He is the Pillar. Whatever you do, do clasping Him; then you will not take any false step and fall. What you do will be right and will be for the good of yourself and of the world. Blessed will be your life on earth.

IX

DIVINE GRACE

(CONVERSATION AT THE BELUR MATH)

THE SWAMI—The name of the Lord purifies both the body and the mind. "I have taken the name of God; what have I to fear? What is there in the world to bind me? I have become immortal by taking the Lord's name"—with such a burning faith one should practise spiritual exercises.

What is the goal of spiritual practices? It is to realise God, to attain Divine grace. The practices are meant to clear the heart of all the impurities brought there by lust and greed. Unless this is done, you can never reach your goal, however much you may try.

You cannot attain God's grace nor realise Him unless you purify your heart. Impurities have gathered in it through innumerable lives, and they are to be removed. Sri Ramakrishna used to cite a beautiful illustration:—"So long as the needle is covered with mud, it is not attracted by the loadstone. But when the mud is washed off, the needle is naturally drawn towards the loadstone." Similarly the dirt of the mind is washed away if one can think of the Lord and meditate on Him; if one can cry unto Him with repentance, saying, "Lord! forgive me. I will not do wrong in the future." At once the magnet of God draws the needle of the mind. Divine grace flows the moment the mind becomes pure; and then the realisation of God takes place as a matter of course.

God is the sun of knowledge. He can be seen only when He reveals His glory to the seer. In fact, so long as a person cherishes a desire for worldly enjoyment, he cannot have sincere yearning for the knowledge or vision of God. Children forget themselves when they get dolls to play with or sweets to eat. But after a time the dolls lose all charm for them; they want to go to the mother. Such is the case with men. Only after they become satiated with the enjoyments of the world do they long for God. Then the thought of God-realisation becomes uppermost in their mind. They are eager to hear what others have to say about God and they try to realise Him in their own lives.

Noble desires do not arise in the mind easily. Know this; those who have them, have them by the special grace of God. In this world of *Maya,* men receive innumerable blows and suffer untold miseries; still they do not want to change their course. Strangely enough, they go again and again to the same place only to get blow after blow. If some one gives them good counsel they feel annoyed with that person.

Men know full well that if they put their hand into the fire, it will get burned; still they do it again and again. Not only that; they invite others to do likewise. If any man differs from them, they call him mad and even go to the point of persecuting him.

Do you not see how guardians try their best to raise obstacles in the way of the boy who wishes to take up the religious path, to lead a *Sannyasin's* life? But they make little effort to turn back one who is leading a wild life and who may become a source of evil to himself and to his country. All the objections rise only when a boy wants to live a virtuous life. People try their utmost to drag him down to their own level.

Do you know what the father of a monk once said referring to his own son? He said, "I would have been happier had he died instead of becoming a monk. There is no control over death; one has to yield to it. But I cannot bear to see others taking away what belongs to me." This is what is called the world, so full of selfishness.

People lose themselves in anger the moment self-interest is hurt. But they have not the sense to understand that if a person is able to be a true *Sannyasin,* not only does he do good to himself, but also he paves the way for the spiritual advancement of those near to him.

Nowadays people have become so very restless, they have not the patience to think seriously before acting. They take up whatever comes in their way, without caring to think whether or not it is likely to do them good. But the mischief does not end here. People train up their children in such a way that they too have to suffer like them when they grow up.

Everyone is born with the impressions of innumerable past lives. The tendency to enjoyment is already strong and the training one gets in childhood intensifies this propensity. How fortunate must they be who have escaped already or are trying to escape from the manifold dangers that threaten their spiritual life!

Through the grace of God, you have been able to give up the world. Beware, that you do not miss this rare opportunity of reaching your desired goal. Be up and doing. Realise God. Do not pay heed to anything else; look up to Him alone. He will take your whole burden. Then you will see that all your lower desires and cravings will leave you altogether.

What can we know of God with our little brain? Nothing. Therefore I ask you to surrender yourself completely to Him. His will be done! He is omnipotent! What power has man? All that you can do is to love God. Have intense yearning for Him. The whole world is mad for something; why run mad after fleeting objects of this world? Better be mad for God. The goal is to realise God. Work can never be the aim of life. Even selfless work is not an end in itself, but only a means to Divine realisation.

Practise spiritual discipline and advance in the way of God. Then you will know that God alone is real, and all else unreal; that the realisation of God is the ultimate goal of life. You may get a little more light after a few days' religious practice. But do not think that you have got everything. Continue your discipline and move onward and onward. Then you will realise God. You will be blessed with His vision. You will be able to know Him intimately.

Hear me, my boys. You are all born of good families and are well educated. You have had enough of study, argument and discussion; why care for more? Now compose your mind and fix it on God. Say to your mind: "Plunge into the ocean of God." You have given up the world. If again you remain busy with trash and do not dedicate yourself to God, you will lose both this world and the next. Through the grace of the Lord you have got noble thoughts and aspirations. Make the best use of this Divine grace. Do not sacrifice the infinite bliss of God for the sake of the ephemeral pleasures of the world. Pray to the Lord, "Grant me, O Lord! the necessary strength to overcome all the obstacles that stand in my way to You."

All worldly pleasures become insipid to him who gets a taste of Divine bliss. What is there in the world? Be it name or fame, wealth or children, —nothing can bring peace to man. These only add to his misery and anxiety.

Why have you come here, leaving your family and home? Is it to increase your burden or to lessen it? All the objects of enjoyment that you see before you vanish the moment you breathe your last. To speak the truth, they only tend to take you into greater and greater darkness. Do you want to tread the path of darkness or the path of light? When you have once got a glimpse of the light, you should not turn your face from it. Do not look at the things of the world. If you do so, you will get lost in them. So great is the influence of desires that if they once leave an impression on your mind, they will drag you down lower and lower; yet they will not let you feel your downward course. The only way to be saved from these dangers is to offer yourself solely to God.

X

POWER OF RENUNCIATION

(AT THE BELUR MATH)

THE SWAMI—Complete self-surrender to the Lord is not an easy matter. The mind always creates doubts and raises such questions as this—"I have neither seen nor known God. How is it possible for me to love and resign myself to Him?" The natural tendency of the mind is to drag us down from higher thoughts and ideals to the things of the world.

Once a certain person complained to Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, I do not feel inclined to take the name of the Lord." "What is it then that draws your mind away?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. "It is my ram. I love it more than anything else," was the reply. "Very well," said Sri Ramakrishna, "when you feed and serve your ram, think that you are feeding and serving the Lord Himself. Do this sincerely for some time and you will find everything all right."

The *Guru* (spiritual teacher) shows the disciple the path to life eternal, and protects him from all troubles. Putting great faith in the words of the *Guru,* let the disciple live them. After a time he will feel that the impurities of his mind are vanishing and Divine Light is making its appearance within. There is no doubt that everything is achieved through faith in the perfect *Guru.* The disciple should look upon him as God incarnate on earth. Through constant thought and meditation on the *Guru,* the disciple is purified both in body and mind. Then the *Guru* appears before the disciple, and revealing the *Ishtam* (Chosen Ideal) to the latter, he passes out of sight. It is said in the salutations to the *Guru*—

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुः गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरः ।
गुरुरेव परं ब्रह्म तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः ॥

"Guru is Brahma; Guru is Vishnu; Guru is Shiva himself. Verily Guru is no other than the highest

Brahman. Salutations unto the Guru."

If the disciple has sincere faith in the *Guru,* it is easy for him to attain Divine knowledge and devotion. The one thing needful is faith in the *Guru.* When this is gained, everything is gained.

Realisation of God is impossible without purification of the heart. Sri Ramakrishna used to say —"If the *Guru* is a perfect and illumined soul, the ego of the disciple is destroyed in no time. But if the *Guru* himself is unillumined, then both he and his disciple have to suffer a great deal. Anyway the disciple is not able to get rid of his ego or the fetters that bind him to the world." It is not possible for an unillumined *Guru* to bring about the liberation of his disciple. How is it possible for an ordinary man to save another from the fetters of the world? The Lord alone, who is the author of this world-enchanting *Maya,* can free man from its meshes.

Only the knower of God can show the way of salvation to another. But how can he, who has not realised God, who has no commission from

Him, who has not been strengthened by Divine strength, how can he free a soul from the bonds of the world? If the blind lead the blind, both are sure to come to grief. It is only after God-realisation that one gets the inner vision. Then only can one truly understand the difficulties of another and give him proper instruction.

If a person possesses sincere yearning for the Lord and is eager to follow the spiritual path, he is sure to find a real *Guru* through the grace of the Lord. Therefore a spiritual aspirant need not feel anxious about finding a *Guru*.

Those who come under the guidance of a *Guru* who has attained realisation need have no anxiety about their spiritual progress. They have been put on the right way. Now their only task is to follow it. If they meet with any trouble or make any mistake, the Lord is sure to protect them and show them the right course. Having sincere faith in the words of the *Guru* let them walk along the path shown by him; that is enough.

What is this world like? It is like the country hog-plum—containing only stone and skin, but no pulp. Besides, it brings acidity and colic to the one who eats it.

You are all pure, young souls. Your mind is now under control, not being distracted by worldly thoughts. You can realise God easily, if you strive from now on. You can fix your mind on God without much exertion so long as you are young. But it is a very hard task to bring the mind under control once it gets scattered.

The Vaishnavas have this beautiful saying—"The *Jiva* has the grace of *the three,*—the *Guru,* the Lord and the devotees of the Lord. But without the grace of *the one* it comes to utter ruin." The meaning is: The disciple has received the grace of the *Guru* through the grace of God, he has also been imbued with noble ideals; besides these two he has the company of holy men. Now what is wanted is the grace of *the one,* that is, of the mind. If the mind is favourable, everything is accomplished. The grace of the others can be felt only when the mind is free from restlessness. The mind must be brought under control. Unless this is done, all strivings prove of no avail.

Therefore I warn you, my boys, "Beware!" Your mind has not yet learned to wander. Before it does so, hold fast the reins. Just as the driver first trains a huge elephant and then makes it do whatever he pleases, so also we have to train the mind in such a way that it may act according to our command. It must not be our master. The only way to train the mind is to lead it to relinquish the desire for enjoyment. The moment this is done, it becomes your slave. It is for this reason that the Bhagavad Gita and other Scriptures speak again and again of the glory of renunciation.

What we want is renunciation. That is the only path, and they alone can realise the glory of renunciation whose mind has not been distracted by the things of the world. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "The parrot learns to repeat the words taught to it when it is young. When it grows beyond a certain age, it cannot learn anything. Then it can only cry 'caw, caw.' "

Divine thoughts leave a deep mark on the tender mind. It is only in youth that one is able to appreciate and grasp the higher ideals of life. But with the advance of age the mind is occupied with manifold things; it becomes restless and always wants to wander; it loses steadiness and the power of sustained thinking. It is very difficult, then, to make any deep impression on it.

How simple and strong is the faith of little boys! They believe what they hear from others and try to act accordingly. They attain success whenever they apply their undistracted mind. But with the advance of age there is a tendency to become sceptical. As people grow older, they begin to doubt everything. At last they reach such a state that it becomes very hard for them to have faith in anything. Therefore I tell you—do what you want to do *now,* when you are young.

We saw in the life of our Master that he used to speak of the life of renunciation particularly to young men. He wanted to impress on their mind the idea that God-realisation is the highest object of life. He knew that the young alone would be able to take up his ideal fully. Fortunately, you are all young and your mind is not tainted by worldly thoughts. Give up all desires and dedicate yourself solely to the Lord. You cannot have Divine bliss and worldly enjoyments at the same time. You cannot get the one without renouncing the other. You cannot give up the lower unless you come to possess a taste for the higher.

This is the proper time for you to fill your mind with the thoughts of the Lord to the fullest extent. Make Him your own. "He is my all"—when this idea is firmly fixed *in* your mind, all your troubles will come to an end. Then no one will be able to do you harm either here or hereafter.

Does he who has tasted the syrup of sugar-candy relish molasses? Worldly joys lose their flavour when one gets a taste of Bliss Divine. All objects of enjoyment appear to be not only insignificant but positively bitter. What I wish to say to you is this—offer yourself, heart and soul, to the Lord and let Him do with you as He pleases.

XI

BRAHMACHARYA

AT THE BELUR MATH

THE SWAMI—In spiritual practices, the same rule cannot be applied to all. We must know the peculiar tendencies of each individual before any spiritual instruction can be given for his guidance. If the instruction goes against the particular bent of his nature, not only will it do no good, but it may even give rise to harmful consequences. It is, therefore, very essential that the *Guru* should study closely the individual tendencies and peculiarities of his disciples, and give instructions in such a form as will readily appeal to their temperaments.

Beyond one or two general rules, no individual can be told in the presence of others what particular path he should follow. I have seen in the case of Sri Ramakrishna how he would take each disciple alone and give him in private the special instructions necessary for him. If you want to ask your *Guru* anything regarding your *Sadhana,* you must do so in private. In a general way, the observance of a few rules will be beneficial to all spiritual aspirants. In the first place, you must have firm faith in God. You must be fully convinced that if you realise God and obtain His grace, all the problems of your life will be solved; you will gain the object for which you have taken this birth; and on getting a taste of Eternal Bliss you will become immortal.

Next is *Brahmacharya* (continence). Without strict *Brahmacharya*, it is not possible for any one to hold fast to great ideals. To secure the full development and vitality of the body, brain and mind, *Brahmacharya* is essential. Those who observe strict *Brahmacharya* develop a strong memory and a remarkable capacity for understanding. By means of *Brahmacharya,* a special nerve is developed which brings about these wonderful powers. Do you know why our great teachers have laid so much emphasis upon *Brahmacharya?* It is because they knew that if a man fail in this respect, everything is lost. The strict *Brahmacharin* does not lose his vitality. He may not look like a *Palwan* (a great athlete) but the development of his brain is so fine that his capacity for grasping supersensuous things is remarkable.

There are certain rules which a *Brahmacharin* must observe. He must avoid exciting food, over-sleep, over-exercise, laziness, bad company and evil conversation. If you indulge in idle talk your brain gets excited, you cannot control your thoughts, and you suffer from sleeplessness and other troubles.

The control of the appetite is also essential. Otherwise you will be subject to many troubles. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Keep your *Bhudi* (stomach) and *Mudi* (brain) cool." It means you can do effective work only if your head and stomach remain calm and cool. The glutton who has no control over his appetite brings ruin on his body and mind. Eating too much of such foods as garlic, onion, or chilli, excites the system, and one finds it extremely hard to control the mind. I believe that those who want to lead a spiritual life should pay special attention to what they eat and drink. It is desirable to take only nutritious and easily digested food. There is no good in overloading the stomach.

No hard and fast rule can be laid down regarding diet. With some, fish and meat might agree very well, while to others they may do harm. Every individual must find out from his own experience the food that agrees with him.

We should eat only in order that our body may remain fit and that we may be able to realise our true nature. The Sastras declare: शरीरमाद्यम् खलु धर्मसाधनम् (Health is the vital factor in spiritual practice). This does not mean that one should think of his body day and night. It means that one should see that the vitality of the body remains unimpaired. One should eat healthy food, avoiding that which excites or produces lethargy.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "You may eat as much as you like during the day, but you must eat only sparingly at night." The idea is that if you take only a little food at night, your body will remain light and you can easily concentrate your mind. Otherwise you will have a tendency to sleep or be lazy. Would you sleep away the night or spend it in meditation? Daytime has many distractions and hence is unsuited for meditation, but at night all creatures go to rest and nature herself is calm and silent. This is the time for aspirants to meditate on the Lord. In the depth of the night the mind is easily concentrated.

Spiritual practices should not be done in public or for show. If you do them before others, they will be harmful to you. People will mock at you, they will offer you advice gratis and give you conflicting suggestions, as a result of which various doubts will arise in your mind and your spiritual progress will be obstructed. The ideal *Sadhaka* behaves thus,—he goes to bed at night with the mosquito curtain drawn down; everybody thinks that he is sleeping, but as a matter of fact he spends the whole night in meditation lying quietly on his bed.

While you are young, you must try hard to get a taste of Divine Bliss. When once you have got this taste, you can never forsake your *Sadhana*. Even at the risk of your life, you will continue your spiritual practices. Those who are troubled with too much sleep in the night will do well to sleep during the day, with a view to devote the night to meditation. The best time for meditation is dawn, eventide and midnight. Too often people waste this time in useless ways.

Sri Ramakrishna never used to spend the night in sleep, nor would he allow the young devotees who stayed with him to sleep long. When others had gone to bed, he would wake up his disciples, give them definite instructions and send them to the *Panchavati*, or the Mother's Temple, or Shiva's Temple for meditation. They would spend the whole night in *Sadhana* as directed, and take rest during the day. It was in this way that Sri Ramakrishna used to take them through various spiritual exercises. Often he used to say, "Three classes of people keep awake in the night,—*Yogis, Bhogis* (seekers of enjoyment) and *Rogis* (sick persons). You are all Yogis. You should by no means sleep away the night."

XII

COMPANY OF HOLY MEN

AT THE BELUR MATH

THE SWAMI—When once you get established in meditation, you will come to know how sweet is the bliss of it. Days and nights pass away unnoticed. You feel that you are floating in an ocean of infinite bliss. Do not speak about your experiences to everybody, least of all to those of a contrary nature. It may hinder your growth. But if you exchange your experiences with one of a like nature with yours and in harmony with your temperament, you may be helped in your progress. Both of you are travellers on the same path. Perhaps your companion has already walked along it and is aware of its dangers and difficulties. Benefited by his experiences, you may be able to avoid those dangers and difficulties.

Do you know the object of *Satsanga* (company of holy men)? The experiences of holy men are a great help to a *Sadhaka.* When you visit a new place, if you have the help of a good guide, you will be able to see within a short time all that is worth seeing there; also you will be saved from the dangers and difficulties into which strangers are likely to fall. Similarly, from the company of advanced *Sadhakas* you will be able to gather many valuable hints, and your spiritual struggle will be very much simplified. The intelligence of an ordinary man does not go very far. Life is short and many things have to be done. So you must find out the best way of doing your work within as short a time as possible. Hence the need of holy company.

This life may come to an end after some years or even today. Nobody knows when the end will come. It is better to get equipped for the journey as soon as possible. To go empty-handed to a strange and unknown place would involve much suffering and sorrow. Birth must inevitably lead to death. Death means going to an unknown place, so you should provide fully for the journey. Finish all your duties here and be ever ready for the great call. Then you will be able to depart from this world with a smiling face. If you have finished all your work, there is no fear for you. You know that you are well provided for the journey.

You have seen that children, while turning round a post, keep firm hold of it. You too should by all possible means hold firmly to the Pillar of life (God). Have faith in yourself. Believe, "I am a man; I can do anything." With such strong faith in yourself forge ahead and you will attain to your life's goal and be blessed forever.

Fear is the greatest sin. Banish all fear and weakness from your mind. When the desire to realise God is alive in you, when you have the opportunity to lead a spiritual life, put forth all your might and get a taste of Supreme Bliss. The cycle of births and deaths is full of misery. Make the best use of your present life. Free yourself from this cycle and become the eternal companion of the Lord.

Unless you can fix your mind on God, you will find it very difficult to keep yourself pure in this world. *Mahamaya* (The Divine Mother) sports in diverse ways and it is not easy to withstand the innumerable temptations created by Her. Lust, anger, greed are almost invincible; to conquer them is no child's play. Through the strength of the Lord alone, not by any other means, can you cut the meshes of *Maya* and make yourself free.

Therefore I urge you to become strong in the might of the Lord. Then you can pass the rest of your life as He wills and directs. It is not given to ordinary mortals to know God through their own exertion. They alone can understand Him, to whom out of His infinite grace He reveals Himself. Only such fortunate persons become free from the net of *Samsara* (worldliness) and obtain pure devotion and liberation.

You must have a routine for spiritual practices. *Nishtha* (steadfastness) is a very important factor; without it no great achievement is possible.

Your steadfastness must be of such a nature that, wherever and under whatever circumstances you may be, the rules that you have laid down for yourself must be observed at any cost. For your meditation, your study, your reflection, your sleep, you must have certain definite hours. If you lead an irregular life, you cannot succeed in anything. Whether it is physical or mental development, the only way to attain it is through a strictly regular life. If a clock gets out of order, the watch-repairer sets it right; then it continues to keep correct time. So with the mind of man. It has become irregular owing to various reasons. By keeping the company of good men, you will get your mind set properly. If you try to mould your life according to the instructions of holy men, you will easily avoid the pitfalls and temptations of life. Following in their footsteps you too will reach the goal attained by them and fulfil your life's purpose.

So long as your mind is not controlled there is great need to observe certain definite rules. Without them you can never get mastery over your mind. The natural tendency of the mind is to shirk work; but when you have made a routine, you must tell your mind, "You are subject to this rule now; whether you like it or not, you must observe it." In this way, you should try to bring the mind under control. When you have succeeded in this, you need not observe any more rules. They will fall off of their own accord.

Life is fast flowing away like a stream. The day that is once gone can never be recalled. So make the best use of your time. Crying out, "Alas! Alas!!" at the last moment will be of no avail. Therefore be up and doing. Make up your mind to realise your goal or die in the attempt. Death is certain. It may come today or tomorrow. If you lose your life in trying to attain God, it is no loss, but a positive gain.

Try to fix your mind on the Lord and firmly resolve to realise Him. What happiness is there in this world? It is all nothing but sorrow and misery. Treat it as worthless. You must go beyond all sorrow and misery. If you get a glimpse of God, you will have Infinite Bliss; and sensuous pleasures will lose all charm for you. When you have once come to the Lord, there will be no room for fear or anxiety. Give up all things of the world and dwell on Him and Him alone.

XIII

THE WORLD AND GOD

AT THE NAYA BAZAR BUNGALOW, BHADRAK

THE SWAMI—God is the *Kalpataru* (the mythical tree that grants whatever a man desires when he is sitting under it). From Him one gets whatever one asks for. Yet, having obtained the rare privilege of human birth, man does not care to direct his mind toward the lotus feet of the Lord. Instead, he drowns himself in the deep ocean of *Samsara* and exclaims, "How happy am I!" God also allows him to remain in that state undisturbed until, tossed about on the waves of sorrow and misery, he repents for the past and cries, "Alas! what have I done!" Then He makes him feel his mistake. Man is, as it were, sitting under the shadow of the *Kalpataru.* If he wants to be a God, so can he be; if he wishes to be a brute, that also he may become.

The Lord has given man both *Vidya* and *Avidya. Vidya* means discrimination and renunciation. With it man may attain the grace of the Lord; while *Avidya,* which means lust, anger, greed, egoism and envy, degrades man to the level of the brute. The culture of *Vidya* destroys *Avidya* and makes man fit for Supreme Bliss; but the growth of *Avidya* strengthens the idea of "I" and "mine," and binds him more and more to the world. He is taken further and further away from God, and has to bear many sorrows and difficulties. Man possesses not only *Vidya* and *Avidya,* but also the power to discriminate between the two. On the nature of his choice depends the success or failure of his life.

It is a great mistake to hold God responsible for your sufferings. You chose a path according to your own will and pleasure, and now enjoy the consequences of your choice. How can you blame God? For a moment's pleasure you forgot everything else; you did not pause to consider right and wrong. If you put your hand into the fire it will naturally get burned. Is it the fault of the fire?

No. You alone are responsible for it . Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "A lamp is burning. Some may read Bhagavatam (Sacred Scriptures) by its light, while others may forge a document or do some other mischief. The lamp is not to blame for it." The Lord has placed before man the two paths,—good and evil. Choose as you please.

As you think, so you become. With the help of discrimination and renunciation, realise God, and become heir to Infinite Bliss. If you run after worldly things, you may no doubt enjoy sensuous pleasures for a time; but you may be sure your future will be dark and gloomy and you will have to pass through endless suffering. The world is so constituted that, if you want pleasure, you must undergo pain. Whether you like it or not, you cannot have the one without the other.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: According to the popular belief, when the Malaya* breeze blows, all the timber trees are converted into sandal trees, while the bamboo, the plantain and other trees remain what they are. Similarly there are two classes of men in this world. Men belonging to the first of these are easily influenced by spiritual teachings which awaken in them *Viveka* (discrimination) and *Vairagya* (renunciation). They regard the world as worthless and yearn for the grace of the Lord. They are determined to realise Him and solve the mystery of existence even at the risk of their lives. With such a firm resolution they begin their *Sadhana* and succeed in the end. The people of the second class can never be awakened either by the sorrows and miseries of life or by any lofty spiritual ideas. They think they are going to live eternally and fondly imagine that without them the world cannot go on. "What I have in my hand, I must enjoy to the full; otherwise I shall be a fool"—thinking thus they drag themselves down to the depths of ignorance and suffering.

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*Name of a mountain range in the South of India abounding in sandal trees.

What is it that you want—the sweet perfume of sandal or the foul odour of filth? Do you want peace or unrest? Decide exactly what you want and strive for its attainment. Time is flowing like a swift stream. It will be of no avail to cry over the past when it is too late. Make the best use of the present, without wasting a single moment. Train your mind in such a way that you may constantly think of God and nothing else. Your days are numbered; they are fast running out. Do not spend your time in vain.

Pray to the Lord with all your heart and soul, "Lord! give me wisdom and make me Thine own." Give up all ideas of "I" and "mine". You have suffered enough on that account. Replace "I" and "mine" by "Thou" and "Thine." Is there anything that you can call your own the moment you die? Nothing you now cherish as yours will accompany you. Those you hold very dear will pass away when their time comes, without caring for you. Leaving everything behind, you will have to go to an unknown place. The more you think of "I" and "mine", the more you fetter yourself. What is there in this *Samsara* for which to spend your whole life? Can this worldly life help you cross the ocean of birth and death? Will it save you from the troubles that may attend you in after-life? What greater misfortune can befall you than to leave unfulfilled the purpose for which you have taken this birth! Make a strenuous effort and pray to Him with earnest devotion that you may reach the goal.

Have you not heard what Sri Ramakrishna used to do at Dakshineshwar? How bitterly he used to cry for a sight of the Divine Mother, saying, "Mother, one more day is gone and Thou hast not yet blessed me with vision of Thee!" Call on Him with an intense yearning. What is this world but an abode of misery? You have spent most of your days here in sorrow and trouble; and do you wish to do the same hereafter as well?

You have come under the shelter of Sri Ramakrishna; know that you have been blessed by Him. Make good use of the grace you have received. It will be really very unfortunate if you fail to solve the riddle of life and death, and do not obtain

Eternal Bliss. You are the men of this age, and have caught its spirit. Do not fail to take full advantage of it. No one in any age has shown the path in such a simple and easy manner as Sri Ramakrishna has done. If you miss this opportunity, you will have to suffer long.

Spread the sails of faith and devotion, and with the aid of the spiritual breeze that is blowing push on to your goal. Do it, and your boat will be carried swiftly to its destination. He is waiting for you. Arise! Awake! Infinite capacity is within you. Have firm faith in yourself and say: "I have heard His name, I have taken shelter at His feet; fear and weakness can have no place in me; by His grace I will attain Him in this very life." Do not look back. Go ahead. Be blessed with His vision; thus fulfil the mission of your life and partake of Infinite Bliss.

XIV

NATURE OF MAN

AT THE RAMAKRISHNA SEVASHRAM, KANKHAL, HARDWAR

THE SWAMI—This place is very sacred. Here it is not difficult to attain concentration of the mind. The very atmosphere is pure. The holy Ganges and the majestic Himalayas naturally induce the mind to become calm and meditative. The eternal sound of *Omkara* can be heard here. Having come to this place, it will be really unfortunate if you spend your time in sleep and idleness. Far better to give up your body in this place practising meditation and austerities.

Human birth is for the attainment of wisdom and devotion, not for living and procreating like brutes. God is most manifest in the human body; try to grasp and realise this. Have you not heard what severe austerities the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna used to perform to realise the Truth? They all saw in Sri Ramakrishna a blazing fire of spirituality, and hence they could do so much. It may not be possible for you to do all they did, but at least try.

Swamiji gave his very life to build up this organisation and to give facilities to you all for your spiritual *Sadhana.* Try to realise the great love that Swamiji bore you. He cut short his life by overwork out of his infinite love for all. Do not be ungrateful to him. He had great faith in Bengal. To you, young men of Bengal, Swamiji has left the charge of his mission as a sacred trust. Remain true and loyal to him. Sri Ramakrishna manifested Himself to the world through Swami Vivekananda, and gave His message through him. Sri Ramakrishna is too great for the ordinary mind to understand. Swamiji has placed Sri Ramakrishna and His ideals before the world so that they may be understood by the ordinary mind. All blessed souls will have to come under His banner.

Read Swamiji's works carefully; and whenever you do not understand any point, ask S———and others to explain it. Swamiji has preached Sri Ramakrishna's ideals in a form intelligible to all. It is madness to try to understand Sri Ramakrishna except in the light of Swamiji's teachings. Read again and again the Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji's works, and plunge yourselves in meditation. If you cannot fix your mind now, you will repent hereafter. This is the best period of your life. Make good use of it. Once you get well established in the spiritual life there will be no fear for you. Then you can turn your mind in any direction you like. Bring your mind under control. When this is done, a good advance has been made. But take care—let not your mind swerve from the straight path even by an inch. When it wants to run astray, curb it by every possible means.

Beginners should have a routine for spiritual practices, with fixed hours for *Japam,* meditation and study. With firm determination tell your mind, "Whether you like it or not, these rules must be followed." After some time a habit will be formed and it will be painful to remain without meditation. When such a state is attained, it means you are progressing toward the ideal. Know that you are nearing God when you feel as restless for His vision as a hungry and sleepy man for food and sleep.

First get a taste of Divine Bliss and become immortal. Then come what may, whether you are cast into the street or placed on a throne, it will be all the same to you. When the iron is turned into gold by the touch of the philosopher's stone, it does not matter whether it is kept in a safe or buried in the ground.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Have the knowledge of *Advaita* in your pocket and act as you please." After attaining the knowledge of the Absolute or supreme devotion to the Lord, whatever work you do will not bind you.

The religious life is full of obstacles. Divine Mother does not easily release men from the bonds of Her *Maya.* To obtain Her grace one should pray with a devout and yearning heart. You have a whole bundle of *Samskaras* (tendencies) acquired in previous lives to overcome, and even now new *Samskaras* are being formed and added. All your life you must be prepared to fight these *Samskaras*. The more you resist them, the stronger will they become. If in the midst of defeats and disappointments you can stick to your path, you will surely reach the goal.

There are two tendencies in human nature, good and bad. The former tends toward renunciation and the latter toward enjoyments. There is constant warfare between these two. The victory of the one or the other determines the nature of man.

Finding innumerable means of enjoyment in this world, men become so much attached to them that they forget that there is another side to the picture. They think: "No one can be sure of the future; why should we not enjoy what we have at present? Nobody knows whether God can be realised or not, whether Eternal Bliss is possible or not. But to enjoy the world is within our reach. Why should we therefore give it up?" Consequently they rush headlong into sense enjoyments. But when bitter experiences teach them that worldly pleasures bring only pain and misery and not peace and happiness, they cry with disappointment, "Alas, what have we done?" By following an unbridled life of enjoyment men become slaves of the senses.

XV

SEEK GOD ONLY

AT THE RAMAKRISHNA SEVASHRAM, KANKHAL, HARDWAR

THE SWAMI—Everyone wants happiness. Who likes to undergo pain and misery? But how to obtain that happiness? Certainly not by running after the fleeting pleasures of the senses and ignoring Him, Who is the abode of all happiness. He has created many playthings to delude the human mind. Throw away all these and pray to Him. He will then hasten to take you in His arms.

I tell you, you have had play enough; it is high time now to give it up and call upon the Mother. When a child is fond of play, the mother gives it toys to while away its time. But the child that does not care for play she carries about with her. Happy is the child that sits in the mother's lap. It not only enjoys the play but has also the happiness of the mother's company. The child that is engaged in play enjoys it no doubt, but also runs the risk of being hurt in its play. It may quarrel with its playmates and get beaten. But the child in the mother's lap has no such troubles. It is always happy and knows full well that the mother will take care of it and supply all its wants.

The parable of the mango grove told by Sri Ramakrishna is very instructive. "You have come to eat the mangoes. Why do you bother yourself about the number of trees, branches and leaves in the garden? Eat the mangoes and be satisfied." You have come into this world for the realisation of God. Accomplish this object first of all and fulfil your life's mission. Solve your own problem and equip yourself for life's journey. Struggle hard and become deathless by tasting Immortal Bliss. Pray to Him day and night. Whatever the form in which you think of Him, it will certainly do you good. Whatever form or name appeals to you, take it sincerely and pray to Him. You are sure to get the vision of Him. Parvati once asked Mahadeva how *Sachchidananda* could be realised. The reply was, "Through faith."

You have been shown the right path. Follow it with faith, patience and perseverance. Waste no more time in discussing the forms and details of your *Sadhana*. Pray to Him in any way you please, and you are sure to get His blessing. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Sweetened bread will taste sweet in whatever way you begin to eat it." You are, as it were, sitting under the *Kalpataru* (wish-yielding tree) and you will get whatever you ask for.

Do not think yourselves too clever. The crow thinks itself very clever, but it lives on filth. Those who are too clever in this world get cheated in the long run.

With a faith that knows no wavering, plunge yourselves in deep meditation. Do not get disheartened, if after a little practice you do not realise God. The ocean is full of precious pearls, but you may not get them at the first dive. My boys, once again I enjoin you, have firm faith in the words of your *Guru*, and try to get absorbed in deep meditation. Be sure, sooner or later you will have a vision of the Lord.

Do not allow your mind to get distracted. Keep steadily and patiently to your *Sadhana.* His grace will descend on you in due time. Suppose you wish to see a great man. You have first to see and satisfy his attendants. Similarly to obtain the grace of the Lord you have to seek the help of godly men and undergo many spiritual practices. Knowing Him to be dearer than the dearest, pray to Him with a yearning heart for His grace and vision.

Cry unto the Lord like a child. Incessant crying cannot but make the mother run to it. So also with the Lord. He reveals Himself to that one who unceasingly prays for His grace and vision.

Shake off your sleep, and seek the grace of the Lord with steadfast devotion. Make the mind one-pointed like the mariner's compass. In whatever direction the ship may sail, the compass always points to the north, thus keeping the ship on its course. Even so with the human mind. If it is fixed on God, there will be nothing to fear. If by chance one is thrown into a bad environment, even then his faith and devotion will remain unshaken. The moment he hears any talk about God, he will become mad with Divine Love—just as the flint, lying under water for a hundred years, when taken out and struck, emits sparks.

Those who have been favoured with a vision of the Lord have their mind always fixed on Him. They will have no taste for anything except to talk of Him and to seek the company of holy men.

Like a fallen leaf tossed to and fro by the wind, be content to remain wherever you are placed by the Lord. Do not have any will or desire of your own.

Your mind is now pure and untainted. Try to keep it in this state always. The spotless mind is like a dry match stick. It ignites the moment you strike it, but it is of no use if it gets wet. You may go on striking it, but it will only break into pieces. Similarly if the mind once becomes soiled, you will find it extremely difficult to restore it to its former purity.

XVI

CONTROL OF THE MIND

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, with all my efforts I cannot control my mind, it is so restless. Please tell me how to curb it.

THE SWAMI—No doubt to control the mind is difficult, but it is not impossible. By regular practice it can be quieted and brought under restraint. Therefore perform a little meditation every day, and never fail to do it. The nature of the mind is to run away like a restless boy. Drag it back whenever it seeks to go out, and set it to meditating on God. If you can continue this struggle for two or three years, you will find in you a joy unspeakable; your mind will be calm and docile. In the beginning meditation proves very difficult and dry. But if you persist, as in the taking of a medicine, you will find in it a perennial source of joy, pure and unalloyed. What terrible ordeals does a student pass through for his examinations! God-realisation is far easier than that. If you call upon Him with sincerity and an unperturbed mind, He will surely reveal Himself unto you.

DISCIPLE—All this is no doubt hopeful, but at times when I think that with so much meditation I have not made any progress, everything seems vain, and a horrible despondency overwhelms me. I despair of success. What shall I do then, Sir?

THE SWAMI—Never despair. There is no cause for despair. The law of Karma is irresistible. If you do a good deed, it will produce a good effect. With sincere devotion or without it, in any way you like, if you chant the holy Name of God, it will always bring you good. The result is inevitable. Therefore shake off all your despair and push on in the struggle with strictness and regularity. Then peace will surely come and dwell in you. Through meditation, not only does the mind become pacified, but the body also improves and diseases lessen. Therefore, even from the standpoint of good health one should practise meditation.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, what is the necessity of spiritual initiation? Without the help of a guide, if a man in his own way devotes himself entirely to God, will not that be enough to realise Him?

THE SWAMI—Initiation is necessary because it helps concentration. When you are initiated you are shown the object upon which the mind is to be concentrated. You cannot let your mind waver from one thing to another. If you are not initiated, you have no particular object to concentrate upon. Today you fix your mind on Hari, tomorrow on Kali, and the third day on the formless Brahman. A grim restlessness is the result. This is most harmful to an aspirant. Until this state is overcome and replaced by a peaceful attitude of mind, spiritual realisation will ever remain a distant prospect. To attain this calmness of mind and to avert unsteadiness, initiation or the help of a guide is necessary. The spiritual path is a most formidable one, strewn with innumerable pitfalls. Unless a man is guided by an experienced hand, however clever he may be, he is sure to stumble.

Without tormenting yourself, work hard, my boy, then will you find joy. In the beginning you are to drudge on as if you were learning the alphabet. Do not worry, do not complain, gradually peace will come. Do you know how I behave with those who always complain that they are not finding peace or joy? For the first two or three years after their initiation I give no reply, nor do I pay heed to them. After that, when they meet me, they tell me that they are making some progress and also finding some joy and peace. A man must try steadily for some time before he can expect a peaceful state of mind. Therefore I ask you to struggle for a period of at least three years without any break; then you can have a claim to joy and not earlier. You will not do anything and yet you want to succeed. Is it not absurd? Nothing great can be achieved by trickery or idleness. If you really want peace, if you truly desire to realise God, then work steadily and wait. Spiritual realisation is a question of time.

Yours is to struggle and to wait. The mother bird knows well when to open the egg. So the

Divine Mother reveals Herself to the devotee when the time is ripe. Work and wait. This waiting period is a very hard time. The devotee is always in suspense—now hope, now despair; now joy, the next moment sorrow: so the struggle goes on. He is constantly fighting a fierce duel and this continues till he is blessed with the vision of God. But if he is led by a competent guide, he can be relieved of much of this struggle. A wise guide can give an upward lift to the struggling mind, even when it is not mature. Such help also has its dangers. If repeated too often, a greater struggle and a deeper despair may result.

In this period of struggle and *Sadhana* the aspirant must be always alert. He must follow certain fixed rules of conduct and never deviate from them. He must observe perfect continence and eat only such foods as have a soothing effect on his body. He will have to be under the direct guidance of one who understands. He must not exert his brain too much in meditation. Otherwise he is sure to suffer; his brain will become heated; he will feel giddy, and other brain troubles will follow.

Meditation in the primary stage being regular warfare with the mind—the mind constantly going outward and the *Sadhaka* trying to drag it back to the feet of the Lord—there is every possibility of the brain becoming overheated. The aspirant should prevent this. In the beginning of his *Sadhana* he should apply himself to *Pranayama* (control of breath) and other *Hatha-Yoga* exercises. He should proceed slowly and steadily in the spiritual path. Then these preliminary struggles will disappear one by one until finally he will attain to the state of real meditation. Then even though he meditates for long hours at a stretch, he will feel as refreshed both in body and mind as after deep sleep. He will also feel great joy within.

The spiritual novice must keep a special eye on his diet. The body and the mind being closely connected, the least change in the one is followed by a corresponding change in the other. If the stomach is irritated by taking any improper food, the mind too will have a like effect; and for a restless mind meditation is impossible. It is for this reason that such stringent emphasis is laid on the dietetic regulations of a *Sadhaka.*

Under no circumstances, again, should the *Sadhaka* fill more than one-half of his stomach with food. (And half of the remaining half is to be left for water, while the rest should be kept empty for the free passage of air.) An aspirant must not be dejected in spirit, brooding on his failures and mistakes. However great a sin a man may have committed, it is a sin only to the limited vision of man; from the absolute standpoint, from the standpoint of God, it is nothing at all. A single glance of the Lord sets at nought all the sins of millions of births. The heavy punishments prescribed for sin in the Scriptures are merely to maintain social order and to make people refrain from the evil ways of life. God, our Father, is ever merciful to us. He is ever loving to His children. His Name removes all evils. Therefore, there is no cause for dejection if we call upon Him sincerely.

It is true, no doubt, that as the result of our past actions, at times dejection and despair sweep over our mind; but that is no reason why a *Sadhaka* should yield to them. Knowing that past actions may try to overwhelm him, he should be prepared to fight against them. God will give him strength. His Name will be an impenetrable armour. It will save him from all consequences. This is one way of *Sadhana*. It is rather dry and monotonous in the beginning. There is another path, the path of the Vaishnavite. It is a very pleasant path. It does not involve so much hardship. It is more gentle. In this path you are to contemplate the life and deeds of Sri Krishna, Sri Rama or some other Incarnation of the Lord. There is no monotony, no drudgery in it. A devotee must establish some relation with God and worship Him in that aspect. But this also has great dangers. It has often been found that many unfit persons, in their attempt to worship God as a lover, have fallen off from their ideal.

XVII

TURNING THE MIND TO GOD

DISCIPLE—Sir, how can we turn our mind to God?

THE SWAMI—By keeping company with the wise and the good; by observing their daily actions and living them in your own life, you can turn your mind to God. You are to imitate the ways and manners of those who have their minds turned toward Him. The great barrier that obstructs your correct vision of God is the doubt and confusion of your mind. They haunt the mind, swing it to and fro, and lead it to run after diverse objects. Drive them out with the sharp sword of discrimination. If you are not able to do so by your own strength, seek the aid of those who are adept in doing it,—the Sadhus.

A beginner should sit beside holy men and listen to them with profound attention and retain their words of counsel in his memory. But it must not end there. He must try to realise what he learns from them. Bear in mind that neither talking, nor learning, nor study, will lead you to realisation, unless you practise and live what you hear and learn. Practice in life is not at all possible without *Brahmacharya,* or absolute continence. Hence *Brahmacharya* is very necessary. Many attempt to realise God by studying the Scriptures; but they do not know that without *Brahmacharya* no one can catch the spirit of the Scriptures, much less realise God.

For various reasons *Brahmacharya* is most essential. If you have the desire to turn your mind to God and realise Him, perform spiritual practices based on *Brahmacharya.* If you wish to read any books I would recommend to you "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" and such works. Read them and then try to realise what you read. The more you read such books, the more light you will find in them. Your knowledge of God derived from hearsay is quite different from that acquired by practising *Sadhana.* This again differs widely from the knowledge you acquire after realisation.

Do you know what Nag Mahashaya used to say? "It is easier to earn fame than to renounce it. He who can renounce it is a really great man." He also said: "An anchored boat does not move forward." He meant, a man whose mind is deep-rooted in lust and gold cannot move Godward unless he can free himself from their deluding influence through austere *Sadhana.* God and pleasure-seeking cannot go together. If you want the one you have to banish the other.

Human birth is a rare privilege; having it, if you do not strive after God, you are surely very unfortunate. Your human birth will have been in vain. Sri Sankara has said: "Human birth, desire for salvation and the company of holy men are rare things on earth. Those who are blessed with all three are the most fortunate among men."

DISCIPLE—As to the best way of directing the mind inward to God, Sri Ramakrishna has prescribed occasional retirement into solitude—for a day or a month or for a year, as opportunity may permit;

you prescribe the company of the holy. Now which of the two are we to follow—holy company or solitude?

THE SWAMI—Both are true and both are to be followed. In the primary stage a man should not suddenly retire into solitude. To do so involves great danger. Many in their effort to cut off human associations have gone mad; hence great caution is necessary. It is only when a man has made some progress in the spiritual path that he can retire into solitude without danger. True solitude can be found nowhere in this world. Time, space and causation are too small to give it. It is beyond mind, beyond intellect. It can be felt only in *Samadhi* (super-consciousness). It is identical with the Most Tranquil.

XVIII

EXAMPLE OF HOLY MEN

THE SWAMI—Read or hear however much you may, nothing will leave a more profound impression on your mind and benefit you so largely and practically as the company of holy men. You learn just from watching their daily life. As an illustration, I would like to relate an incident from the life of a devotee. Adhar Sen went to Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by a friend of his, an Inspector of Schools. This friend would at times experience a kind of inspiration and lose all outward consciousness. People called it *Bhava*. One day it so happened that just after their arrival, the Master fell into deep *Samadhi*. From his face beamed a lustre divine indicating the unbounded joy that the Master felt. At sight of this, Adhar Babu said to his companion: "Look here, my friend. I see your *Bhava* is not real *Bhava*. Whenever you enter it, you seem to feel a great torment within. From Divine communion no torment or torture can result. By what I see now in the Master, this flood of Divine joy, my eyes are opened."

Another man once visited Trailinga Swami, the great saint of Benares, who usually kept silent. On his return he thought within himself: "I went, but he did not speak; then what is the good of going to him any more?" Nevertheless he paid him a second visit. This time, no sooner had he taken his seat by the side of the Swami than the latter suddenly began to weep bitterly and then he began to laugh. He was beside himself with madness of devotion. At this the man said to himself: "What I have learnt today a thousand books could not teach. When I shall so yearn for God, I shall see Him; when I shall have His grace, only then shall I enjoy such bliss."

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, many maintain that merely paying visits to holy men is enough—hearing them or observing their life is not necessary. Are we to believe this?

THE SWAMI—No! Never! You must mix

with them—with an open heart. If any doubt arises in your mind, you must tell it to them frankly and get it solved by their help, if you are not able to do it yourself. You must also observe their life in detail and model yours by what you see in them.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, you said that momentary enthusiasm brings no good, that spiritual realisation is a question of time—am I then to give up my yearning for God-realisation?

THE SWAMI—I might have said that in connection with something else. By momentary enthusiasm is meant, to become restless and cry and jump for a day or two from a fit of emotion: an external manifestation of a sudden internal feeling. This disappears in no time; then out of despair and dejection, man gives up the path altogether.

DISCIPLE—As Sri Ramakrishna has said, if the place for digging a well is shifted again and again, you will never get water. Is that what you mean?

THE SWAMI—Yes, tenacity is what is required. If a man's restlessness results from sincere love of God, he cannot live a God-less life, even though he fails to realise Him. Millions of births may pass without attaining Him, yet he will persist in calling upon Him steadily and quite unmoved.

Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) used to say that a little awakening of the *Kundalini* (individualised cosmic energy) was very dangerous. Until She rises up higher, lust, anger and other lower passions become very disturbing. The Vaishnavite *Sadhana* of *Madhur Bhava* or *Sakhi Bhava* (the attitude of worshipping God as an eternal bridegroom or a friend of the devotee) is exceedingly dangerous. In trying to remember constantly the story of Sri Krishna's Divine play with Sri Radha, they (Vaishnavites) cannot control their lust and they do all sorts of lecherous acts. Hence the restriction for the beginner in reading the *Rash-lila* (story of Sri Krishna's Divine play with Sri Radha) and such works.

Meditation is not an easy thing. Eat a bit more and your mind will not settle that day. When lust, anger, greed and the whole host of evil passions are kept under control, then and then alone does meditation become possible. If any one of these asserts itself, meditation will be impossible. It is easier to sit in a circle of burning fire. But to keep the passions under control and not allow them to make an impression upon the mind—that is real *Tapasya.* What religion can there be for eunuchs! The control of passions and desires is the greatest penance. Seeing that worldly men are constantly engaged in unholy acts, it is not so much of a sin on your part if occasional evil thoughts crop up in your mind. Drive them out.

Without meditation the mind cannot become tranquil, and without tranquillity religion is not possible. To think "I shall meditate when the mind grows tranquil" is to think an impossibility. Tranquillity and meditation must go hand in hand.

We cannot love Sri Ramakrishna so long as there is the idea of bargaining in us. That is why we despair when we cannot see Him after a little prayer. Still again, it is not desirable to give expression to our inner feelings, for that lessens the intensity of love.

XIX

MEDITATION

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, how can God-yearning be intensified?

THE SWAMI—Through steady spiritual practice with a mind purified by the influence of holy company and the instruction of the *Guru* (spiritual teacher). In this world even in the art of stealing, a *Guru* is required. How much greater must be the necessity of a *Guru* for acquiring supreme knowledge of Brahman!

DISCIPLE—How can one attain peace?

THE SWAMI—Peace and sincere love of God and true faith come together. At the very start how can one attain peace? First must come restlessness, yearning and intense pain for not having seen Him; the greater the thirst, the sweeter the water. We must rouse unrest in the heart. When a man does not find happiness in the world, then he grows restless and attachment to God awakens within him.

DISCIPLE—How can love of God grow?

THE SWAMI—By *Sadhana* and prayer—thus have all attained.

DISCIPLE—Is it possible in the world?

THE SWAMI—Is there any one outside the world?

DISCIPLE—No, I mean, living in the family.

THE SWAMI—It is possible, but very difficult.

DISCIPLE—When dispassion for the world comes, should one renounce?

THE SWAMI—That is what is called *Vairagyam*—yes, that is real *Vairagyam* (dispassion). Real *Vairagyam* is like fire,—it is never extinguished, but gradually spreads and grows hotter. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, as a fish swims about merrily when put in larger waters, so is the man who has renounced the world; never does he want to be fettered again.

DISCIPLE—Is it possible without a *Guru?*

THE SWAMI—I think not. *Guru* means one who shows the path to the *Ishtam* through a Holy Name (Mantram). *Upa-gurus* (intermediaries) can be many. But the supreme *Guru* is one that commands: "Practise these *Sadhanas* and move with holy men." In olden times the custom was to live with the *Guru*. The *Guru* would watch over the pupil and the pupil would serve him. When the pupil went astray, the *Guru* would bring him back. So none but the knower of the Brahman, or one far advanced in *Sadhana*, should be chosen as the *Guru*.

DISCIPLE—How to know him?

THE SWAMI—By moving with him closely for some time. The *Guru* too will watch his would-be disciple. If the disciple possesses a strong desire for enjoyment and can not be easily brought round, the *Guru* will not initiate him. He will reject him. Whomsoever the *Guru* chooses, he will keep with him and watch over him. The family *Guru* has one advantage, that he knows everything regarding the family to which the disciple belongs.

The way to focus the mind is by prayer and worship, concentration and meditation. *Pranayama* (control of breath) too is a way, but not safe for the householder—the loss of the vital fluid brings about disease. Good food, a good place and pure air—these are necessary: there is no other condition for meditation. Meditation in solitude has to be practised—not for an hour or for a day; the more you practise, the more benefited you will be. Go wherever you choose. If you find a good place with favourable surroundings, take that for your practice. Seek Him and Him alone. Give up *Kamini-Kanchana* (lust and greed). First practise renunciation in the mind,——draw in the mind from earthly things.

In the beginning meditation must be *Sakara* (with form), then *Nirakara* (formless) and finally you realise that "Brahman is real and all else is illusion." The world as it appears to us is all illusion. In *Samadhi* the world does not exist, only bliss, as after deep sleep a man says, "I tasted real joy." When a man descends (from *Samadhi*) like the Rishis he says of his experience, "It was bliss and bliss only; words cannot describe it. The 'I' and 'Thou' vanish—*Sachchidananda* (Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute) alone remains."

If asked, "What is the proof that God exists?" the answer is, "I have seen God, and you too can see Him if you follow me." So have said all the saints and saviours. As Sri Ramakrishna has said: "By merely repeating the name of *Siddhi* (hemp leaves) you cannot become intoxicated. Gather them, grind and dissolve them, drink them and wait for a while, then alone will you feel the intoxication. In the same way, simply crying out 'Lord', 'Lord' will not do; practise *Sadhana* and wait."

DISCIPLE—In performing *Japam* sometimes I forget everything; what is that, Sir?

THE SWAMI—The *Panchadashi* is of opinion that this feeling stands as an impediment. Meditation means to think of Him; and when this is intensified, when God becomes visible, it is *Samadhi.* After *Samadhi* the blissful emotion lingers on for a long time. Some hold, it continues for ever.

Sri Chaitanya sent a man to Ramananda. Ramananda lived a life of luxury, but at the name of the Lord a fountain of tears of devotion burst from his eyes. The man did not understand why he wept. They say, if you are not a *Sadhu* you cannot know a *Sadhu*—as a brinjal seller cannot appraise a diamond. Only that one who through *Sadhana* has attained a higher stage can understand a true devotee.

At the time of meditation you must think that desires and passions have no existence, that they are unreal. Gradually this impression will sink into your mind. As you drive out these thoughts, force in good ones. During your meditation, if you perceive some light or sound, know that you are going along the right path. But these are trivial signs. Still, as signs, they are good. Meditating in a lonely place, one can hear the sound of *Pranava* (sound symbol of the Brahman) or that of a bell or a sound from a distant place.

There was a man,—a great dare-devil. Fifteen minutes before his death he said: "Carry me straight to the Ganges. Do you think I wish to die here?" Reaching the sacred stream he smiled and prayed: "Mother! I have sinned much. I believe, Mother, Thou canst wash away everything. Save me, Oh! *Mother!"* And he died.

XX

GOD-VISION

Conversation at Calcutta, 2nd of February, 1922. The Swami is the honoured guest of a devotee.

THE SWAMI—A pure, healthy mind is what is required. Remain under the shelter of His lotus feet. He will do all that is needful; you have only to keep your mind fixed ever on Him. Give up all longing for the world. It is a very unholy place. Pay no more heed to it than is absolutely necessary; devote the rest of yourself to God. I tell you, you are just the person to do this. Try and you will succeed. Struggle and struggle—you will have to struggle hard. Begin this moment; no more delay, no more doubt, no more speculation. Oh, the joy of realisation, the satisfaction of it! Just a little of it even, will suffice for you. Strive; strive to cross over *Mahamaya* (Divine illusion); yes, in this very life you must go beyond it. Strive hard; it is indeed a difficult task. Faith, unshakable faith is necessary. Without that you cannot succeed. Be determined; remove all doubts; then you can tear the veil of *Maya* and see God. Faith, you know, is the only resource; strengthen it by all possible means.

DISCIPLE—If doubt creeps in at times, what shall I do?

THE SWAMI—You cannot have unshakable faith until God-realisation comes. It is possible only when you have the vision of God, when you have realised Him. Till then you can only make an approach to true faith; nothing more. Whenever doubts disturb the even balance of the mind, hold fast to God and pray. If you can do so over and over again, your conviction will be firm and invincible. Doubts surely will come, but drive them out in this wise. Think within yourself: "God is, but because of my lot I cannot see Him. The moment His grace descends, that moment I shall be blessed by seeing Him." Do not lose faith. Cling to Him always and under all circumstances.

This gross mind cannot comprehend God. God is beyond mind, He is far beyond intellect. The world that you see is within the domain of the mind; the mind is its author, the mind has created it, and beyond it the mind cannot go. But through *Sadhana* a subtle mind opens up—the mind of spirit. That is already in you, but in the form of a germ. In course of time this germ will develop and unfold. The gross mind will lead you to the subtle. The subtle shines forth in the glory of its own self. It is at this stage that you can have the vision of finer truths. The world with all its diversity will then lose all charm for you. It can delude you no more. Then you will pass your time, day and night, completely lost in the contemplation of God and His glory.

The next stage is *Samadhi.* This *Samadhi* cannot be described. It is beyond the reach of the gross mind, beyond language. It is beyond *Asti* and *Nasti* (human calculation), beyond pleasure and pain, beyond joy and sorrow, beyond light, beyond darkness, beyond all duality. Human language is too feeble to say what that blessed state is.

"The Vedas all deal with the three *Gunas*. Be thou free, O Arjuna, be thou free from the three *Gunas*," Sri Krishna says in the Gita. If you want God, you must transcend the limits of the *Gunas*. Disputes and dissensions, wars and feuds, malice and jealousy, egotism and pride, these are the products of *Tamas*. *Rajas* goads man to activity, and creates the desire for name and fame. A man full of *Rajas* meditates for half an hour at best and then looks around to see if it has attracted the notice of others. If it has not, he thinks his meditation is all in vain; this half hour's meditation! He is a beggar of popular applause. Then comes *Sattwa* (the state of serene vision). The Vedas deal with these *Gunas*, but we must not stop here. We must go beyond the *Gunas*.

DISCIPLE—In this world certain works seem to us as duties; how are we to do these, Sir?

THE SWAMI—"This world is God's. Nothing

in it can I call my own; He is getting His work done by me; verily nothing belongs to me." If you can do what you call your duties with this attitude, then they will do you no harm; your work will no longer bind you. "This thing belongs to me, that is mine," this attitude you must banish from your mind; in its stead say: "Everything is God's, even myself; I am placed here by His Will, and I shall be removed hence the moment He wills it." Let this be your principle of life. Do not identify yourself with the things of the world.

Do your duties with this attitude; and also do them thoroughly and well, so that people may not perceive your real motive and blame you. But in the heart of hearts know, earthly things you have none. God is the Doer and you the instrument. Through you, He will get done what He likes to have done.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, in my attempt to do work in this way, if at times I forget the true motive, if egotism asserts itself and if attachment prevails, what then?

THE SWAMI—Do not yield to depression. Never allow yourself to be depressed. If at times you forget your true motive, never mind. Begin once more with redoubled energy and see that it does not recur again. Doubts and confusion? Who can kill them before God-realisation is attained? They will come and they will go. That is their nature. But do not get dejected. Shake off despair, shake off disappointment, shake off doubt; make no compromise. Have infinite tenacity, and infinite energy. "To do or die"—let this be your motto. God you must realise; now in this very life you must see Him. In vain is your being, in vain your mind, in vain your life, everything is in vain, if you cannot realise Him here in this very life. Therefore, say boldly: "What shall I do with the body, what is the use of the mind, if I cannot see God with them? What do I care if they perish? Let them stay or go, but I must see God; I must see Him."

XXI

DIFFERENT METHODS OF ATTAINMENT

DEVOTEE—Maharaj, these different forms of worship, these different rituals, these different gods and goddesses,—do they mean anything special?

THE SWAMI—All these have one and the same purpose—God-realisation. There is so much difference between one man and another in their inclinations and their temperaments that no one method can be assigned to all for their *Sadhana* or spiritual advancement. Different temperaments require different *Sadhana* and different ways of worship. To meet these varying demands the Scriptures have prescribed four principal means,—*Samadhi, Dhyana,* actual *Japam,* prayer, and external worship.

The best kind of worship is *Samadhi* or the direct worship of the Brahman—the actual vision of the Omnipresent Reality.

The second in importance is *Dhyana* or meditation, where two things exist,—"Himself" and "myself." *Japam*, prayer and the like have no room here. When meditation deepens, one perceives the holy form of one's *Ishtam* or chosen Deity,—the form, pure and simple. Here again *Japam* and prayer have no place. The next step is *Japam* and prayer, in which one sings the glory of the Lord praying, chanting or repeating the hallowed Name of one's chosen Deity, simultaneously meditating upon the blessed form behind that holy Name.

The last is external worship. This consists in worshipping the Supreme Being in *Pratika* or images. These different forms of worship, different gods and goddesses—all these are but creations of the human mind. They mark different degrees of progress of the mind, its evolutionary stages, in its onward march to God. A man desires to perform *Sadhana*. Now, what should he do? Can he begin from any point? No. He must start exactly where his mind stands and proceed stage after stage till the Goal is reached. Take the case of an ordinary man: if you ask him to meditate upon the

Supreme Brahman who is without name or form; or if you ask him to practise *Samadhi,* he will not comprehend, nor will he be well-disposed towards his task. The result will be that he will give up *Sadhana* altogether. On the other hand, if he worships the Brahman in an image with offerings of flowers and sacred leaves, he will think he has done something. For some time at least, his mind will be free from distractions, into which every moment it is liable to fall. He will be unperturbed, and will rejoice in his worship. By and by he will outgrow that stage.

The finer the mind grows, the less becomes the joy of man in things gross and secular. If you begin *Puja* or external worship now, later on you will feel naturally that *Japam* is a better substitute. Then you will find in meditation a far better substitute, and so on. This gradual process is the natural way of growth for the human mind. In the course of this mental evolution, the experience the mind acquires is not lost; the mind retains and stores it up in the memory.

Take an illustration: standing down in the courtyard, you wish to get on the roof. What will you do? You have to find the stair-case and, climbing the steps one after the other, you reach the roof. Instead, if you are thrown through the air right up to the house-top, that certainly would mean a great deal of discomfort and danger. You can avoid hurt or injury only by following the gradual process. So is it with the world within. To avoid all untoward circumstances in your march toward spiritual realisation, you must follow the gradual path that is marked out for us by the seers of the past. These different forms of worship constitute that path. Ways and means, rules and regulations—these exist in the physical world as well as in that of the mind. The same law rules both.

DEVOTEE—If a distracting thought, well-known to me, persists in rising in the mind, what shall I do then, Revered Sir? How shall I check it?

THE SWAMI—"This thought is immensely harmful to me; it can bring about my ruin; it is my worst enemy"—impress this idea on your mind by repeated effort. Once you can stamp this impression upon the mind, you will find the distracting thought vanishing in no time. Take, for example, this boy who is sitting here. "This boy—who is he? I do not know him. He is good for nothing; he is worthless"—if you persist in thinking thus for some time, before long you will find that he has become so; for you he will be of no importance whatsoever. Your mind will no longer turn toward him. And why? Because you have impressed upon the mind that idea. Take one more illustration,—a little child: it does not know the results of taking poison. If you give it a little poison it will not care; it will not be afraid. But if that very same thing is given to you, you will start and recoil to a safe distance. It is because you know the effect of poison. So we see the mind is a strange thing; whatever you hold before it, it will learn.

One thing, and a very serious thing, I must tell you: first choose your ideal and then struggle to realise it. The ideal must never be lowered. God is the highest ideal—God who is smaller than an atom and bigger than the solar system; He who shines forth everywhere, at all times and in all beings, in you and in me; differing only in manifestation, greater or smaller. He is the same as the Atman that pervades the entire universe. Nothing is superior to Him. Make Him your ideal, Him and Him alone. Try a little, and you will realise what an inexhaustible fount of joy He is. The world—you have had enough experience of it! Now try the other side—seek God. The veil of *Maya,* ignorance, hangs before you, obstructing your vision of God; tear it off and lo, He is there! To cross *Maya's* bounds is indeed a hard task, but not an impossibility. Men have crossed before you and you can also cross. Strive on, success is at hand; "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." The world will stand transformed to these very eyes of yours.

DEVOTEE—Regarding the Scriptures, what attitude should we maintain? Should we put faith in their authority?

THE SWAMI—Certainly! All these Scriptural injunctions are true. For the good and guidance of mankind through the ages, these have been formulated by men of the past and handed down from generation to generation, from father to son, up to the present day. You must obey them.

Another thing: as regards *Karma* (work), you must never give it up wholly. Without it your very existence would be impossible. It can also lead you, in the end, to God-realisation. Man does not know when *Karma* began, but he knows where it ends. Verily, with God-realisation all the shackles of *Karma* fall off; then, no more work remains to be done. But until that state is reached you are within the bounds of *Karma* and you have to work. By doing your *Karma* for the sake of *Karma* you will attain to the greatest Good.

DEVOTEE—And what sort of food are we to take, Sir? Are there any rules about diet?

THE SWAMI—A very difficult question! It is very hard to answer. Men differ so widely in their constitution that it is hardly possible to lay down any hard and fast rule about food. One thing may be suitable to your constitution, but the same may not suit mine. Our Scriptures therefore have not laid much stress on this point. In the Gita we come across certain passages referring to discrimination about food; but that is a general classification. Roughly speaking, it can be said that rich dishes should be avoided. One should choose one's own food according to one's power of assimilation.

DEVOTEE—Maharaj, non-vegetarian diet,—does it not involve sin,—the sin of killing animals?

THE SWAMI—No. They say *Ahimsa* (non-injury) is the greatest virtue, but when? Only after *Samadhi,* when the supreme knowledge has been attained, when God has been realised in all creatures. Then only can there be true *Ahimsa.* Before that, no amount of talk can make it so. It comes when you realise that the same Atman resides in you as well as in the little ant, and that no difference exists. Before that it is impossible. You may speak of *Ahimsa,* but truly speaking, can you avoid *Himsa?* What food do you take?

Potato? It shoots forth young sprouts when planted; these bring a new crop; is the potato lifeless? Sow the paddy grain; it grows into a plant; and this again bears new paddy. Is the paddy then lifeless?

Examine a drop of water under a microscope and you will find millions of little lives; and you drink it! Again, to live is to take breath. Now, with every breath you kill millions of little creatures. Take the case of those who make much of this vegetable diet. What food do they prescribe? Milk and Ghee? Now, how do you get milk? By depriving a poor creature, the tiny calf, of its legitimate food. That is an extremely cruel act. But that is no sin, in common parlance, and all the sin lies in a bit of fish or meat! Such flimsy arguments cannot stand. The old Hindus never had such ideas. It is a later Vaishnavite interpolation.

XXII

SAMADHI

THE SWAMI—*Samadhi* is mainly of two kinds, *Savikalpa* (ecstatic state of dual consciousness) and *Nirvikalpa* (undifferentiated state of consciousness). In the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* a man loses all knowledge of name and form, and the whole world vanishes into nothingness. In the Cossipore Garden, Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) attained the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, but very few knew of it, for he seldom spoke of his experiences. There is yet another kind of *Samadhi* called *Ananda Samadhi*. In this the mind tastes such ecstatic joy that the body can scarcely hold it and as a consequence the *Brahma-Randhra* (the gate of the body in the top of the head) gives way. In this blissful state of consciousness, the body lasts three weeks at best, and no longer.

Men visualise God in different forms, *Sattwic, Rajasic* and *Tamasic,* according to the predominance of one or other of these three qualities. What a pity that instead of trading in this priceless merchandise, people bargain for paltry worldly things! Men must cultivate the habit of remembering and thinking on God constantly, for they have only God to call their own and they have to realise this truth in this life.

The natural bent of the ordinary human mind is towards enjoyment, but that must be changed and the mind given an upward turn. Sri Ramakrishna's mind ever soared in the region of Bliss Supreme; especially during His *Sadhana* under the Panchavati (at Dakshineswar) it reached such a high pitch that time passed unnoticed. He totally lost all appetite for food and drink. But, since His body had to be preserved, the man who waited upon the Master would thrust a morsel of rice into His mouth whenever He seemed to come down from the exalted state of bliss in which He usually remained. In this way, during the whole day and night, the Master was made to swallow some seven or eight morsels of rice at most.

Much later when we met Him, even then we could mark that He had to bring His mind down to the physical plane by force.

One day in the course of His teaching the Master spoke at length about the *Shabda Brahman* (the manifestation of Brahman as sound). This was the subject of my noontide meditation in the Panchavati, and lo! suddenly I had the truth of His words revealed to me: I heard the birds on the trees around sing the Divine Vedic lore.

On one occasion Sri Ramakrishna said: "One day as I was meditating in the Kali Temple, in a vision I saw the screens of *Maya* (ignorance) disappear one after the other from my sight. Another day, Mother held before my eyes a flood of light surpassing in effulgence and splendour a million suns, and out of that luminous mass I saw a form, purely of the nature of consciousness, emerge slowly, only to melt away into the light the next moment." The formless assumed form, and the form lost itself in the formless!

One day entering the Kali Temple, K. began to admonish the Mother in a violent tone: his chest became red and tears trickled down from his eyes in great anger. Sri Ramakrishna who had all this time been inside the Temple, perceiving his tone, came out and said: "True, temper can be shown to our near and dear ones; but yours is a very difficult attitude (*Virabhava* or the attitude of a lord to his consort). Mine is *Matribhava* (the attitude of a son to his mother)."

The human body is the greatest temple of God. For this reason the Scriptures enjoin that meditation and worship should be performed in the body. In this body is the *Sahasrara* (the thousand-petalled lotus in the head, *i.e.*, the upper brain) from where the mind does not ordinarily come down, if once it ascends there. It is for this reason that the Scriptures say: "When in the *Ratha* is seen the *Vamana*, rebirth is at an end"; which means that in this very body (*Ratha*) resides God (*Vamana*); and realising Him therein, man escapes the repeated cycles of birth and death. In this body Ramaprasad saw the Lord, the Father and Mother of all, and instantly he sang, "Thou abidest in this body, Oh Mother, and herein do I see Thee."

There is a third eye, the eye of knowledge, in this body on the forehead between the eye-brows. When it opens, one sees, as Sri Ramakrishna has said, everything blissful and happy around him. What is true of the Macrocosm is true of the Microcosm.

How wonderful it is that God is so near us! Verily, if a man can once realise Him and have a taste of Bliss Divine, he will forthwith lose all taste for everything else. The temples, cars and chariots used in external worship are but symbols of the greatest temple of God, the human body.

XXIII

POWER OF MIND

THE SWAMI—A King lives in his palace within seven gates. A poor man begs of the Minister a royal interview and his prayer is granted. The Minister leads him through the gates to the royal presence. Now, finding an officer richly dressed and stationed at each gate the man asks his guide if he (the officer) is the King; but every time the answer is in the negative. When they enter the seventh gate, at the sight of the exquisite beauty and grandeur of the real King the man at once recognises him as such and asks the minister no more. Such is the case with the *Guru*: like the Minister, the *Guru* leads the disciple through different stages till he leaves him with the Lord.

No *Guru* is greater than your own mind. You will see when your mind is made steady through meditation, it will dictate from within what you have to do and which way to follow. Even in your daily duties it will show what is to be done first and what next. Thus it will lead you on till the Goal is reached.

You can develop your mind and make it steady in either of two ways,—by retiring to a solitary retreat and making the mind absolutely unsusceptible to any change through concentration and meditation or by continually thinking good thoughts and developing love and attachment toward God. The mind is just like a milch cow which gives a larger supply when fed well. Give the mind more food and you will find it giving you better service in return. And what constitutes the food of the mind? Meditation and concentration, prayer and worship, and all such practices.

There is a class of *Sadhakas* who let loose their mind and keep a strong watch over its movements. The mind, after roaming here and there, nowhere finds lasting peace, consequently it turns back to

God and takes refuge in Him. The fact is, if you look after the mind, the mind will look after you. This being the case, it behoves you to keep a vigilant eye on the movements of the mind and analyse them with the utmost care and scrutiny. For this mental analysis no place is more suitable than a place of solitary retirement. It is for this purpose that the Rishis of old always selected the Himalayan retreats or the bank of the Ganges to carry on their spiritual practices. The mind has to be purged of all attachment; it must be made transparent or it will not be able to catch the reflection of God. True renunciation consists in giving up all attachment for worldly objects to which the mind is bound. When the mind is once freed from this shackle it will not be affected in the least, even though it is placed in the midst of numberless objects of sense. Hence the value of struggle. A man who has no struggle in his life is lifeless. But he who bravely faces any obstacle that comes in his way will have the reward of everlasting peace.

The most favourable time for meditation is the time of *Samyama*, the hour when the day closes and night commences, and when the night closes and day breaks. At these hours Nature is calm and at rest. This is the reason why early rising forms an essential factor in the religious life of a man. At this time the *Sushumna Nadi* (the central nerve within the spinal cord) sets to work and as a result the breath passes through both nostrils,—the usual course which is generally through one only, either the *Ida* or the *Pingala* disturbing the mind. Certain Yogins always watch for the time when the *Sushumna* starts to function and when it is actually at work, at once they will sit for meditation, leaving aside whatever they may be engaged in.

Man wants peace; but how can he realise it unless he can establish a close intimacy with God and make Him his own; unless in the mental world he can hold intercourse with Him,—feed Him, dress Him and behave with Him sweetly and cordially just as he does with his near and dear ones, his friends and relatives on this physical plane? To acquire this mental attitude the easiest course is to think constantly on Him; it is therefore the simplest of all *Sadhanas*. Mysterious is the way of God. He is infinite and finite. He also incarnates Himself in the human form. Who can understand Him? Bhusandi, the Crow, at first took Ramachandra for an ordinary being; but unable to procure any shelter in the three worlds—heaven, earth, or the nether world—when chased by the unseen Hand of Rama, at last he recognised Him as God incarnate and prayed to Him. Many and varied are the paths through which God leads man; and nobody knows through which path he will be led. God sometimes leads him through a thorny path and at other times through a soft, rosy one. The one course open to man therefore is to resign himself wholly at His Feet. This is the only way out.

The body, mind and the senses all become low and benumbed through the debasing influence of *Maya*. "Ensnared in the trap of the five elements," says Sri Ramakrishna, "the Brahman Himself weeps and laments." Such is *Maya!* But to a man who has first realised God, who has transcended once for all Her deluding charms and attractions, a thousand worlds cannot do the least harm. Such a man is beyond the bounds of *Maya,* and to such a one alone are revealed Her mysteries.

Under the delusion of this divine *Maya,* man cannot comprehend how terribly painful and troublesome it is to be born and to live in this world. The body is decaying day by day; still he is forgetful of the sacred mission for which he has taken this human birth. In spite of the troubles and tribulations of life here on this earth, human birth has a unique advantage. It is only in this birth that a being can realise God. Therefore without paying heed to the ease and comforts of this frail form, a man should do here such meritorious works as will produce lasting effect hereafter and thus terminate the repeated cycles of birth and death. Indeed, for the sake of mental peace one has to invoke peacelessness. Such is the teaching of the wise.

XXIV

WORSHIP OF GOD

ADMONITIONS TO A DISCIPLE

i

THE SWAMI—Pilgrimages are beneficial in many ways. The chief advantage is that we are enabled to meet holy men and serve them. Another advantage is that worldly thoughts tend to decrease and there is constant remembrance of God. No doubt these will aid us in our spiritual progress. We will gain much spiritual knowledge also.

Kashi (Benares) is a very sacred place. Many *Sadhus* (holy men) live there. Thus we get the opportunity to be in their company. A spiritual current is always flowing in Kashi. Householders have many facilities for the worship of the Lord there. It would be good if you could stay there for a time.

Vrindavan is another sacred place. There are many *Sadhus* there immersed in the contemplation of the Lord day and night. You ought to go and see those places. Work you will have always. But in spite of this, find time to visit these places at least once. So far as work is concerned, there is some which will lead you Godward. Unselfish work belongs to this class. But selfish work will never help you in your spiritual path. Know that your wife, children and all which you now call yours belong to the Lord. If you have this firm belief, everything will go on all right for you. The contrary belief will bring about a contrary result.

ii

Repetition of the holy Name of the Lord is very good. The mind will become pure through it. While repeating the Name of the Lord you should keep remembrance of the Lord in your mind. Such repetition and remembrance will do much good. Mere repetition without the remembrance of the Lord will not be of much use. I do not say that this is easy. To do it one must have *Upadesh*, or initiation by the *Guru*.

The *Guru* will determine your *Ishta-Devata* (form of Ideal) and other things necessary for your spiritual progress. According to the difference in the nature of each individual, there are many *Ishta-Devatas.* One cannot suit all. Until spiritual knowledge dawns upon you, you have to follow the directions of your *Guru.* The more you work, the purer you become.

To practise without the aid of the *Guru* is always very difficult. A few rare souls of exceptional strength of mind might be able to realise without any such external help. Yet it is better to work under the guidance of a *Guru.* Then there is no possibility of your committing any mistake. Still you should not remain idle because you have not got a *Guru.* Begin at once and the *Guru* will come in proper time.

The *Guru* must select the *Shishya* (disciple) and the *Shishya* must choose the *Guru.* Otherwise if one alone selects, it is not so good. Only a perfect soul (*Siddha-Guru*) can really help the disciple. Such a *Guru* alone can give initiation according to the differences in the nature of the disciples. An ordinary *Guru* can do no such thing. This latter is ready to give *Upadesh* to anyone at any time. When the proper time comes, God will send you your *Guru.* Until you get such a *Guru,* your duty is the worship of the Lord. If not, your days will be spent in vain. Hence have regular meditation, *Japam,* and *Bhajanam* (singing the praises of the Lord) every day.

iii

As you proceed with meditation you will see that you are getting more and more realisation. There is no use in merely reading the *Shastras* (Sacred Scriptures) and discussing about them. By meditation, the mind will become pure, and when the mind becomes pure, realisation of God follows as a matter of course. Ordinarily, we hold our mind on worldly matters. No result worth the name comes out of this. But if you fix your mind in the pure thought of God, you will feel a taste of real bliss.

All your energy is spent in worldly things. Exert yourself a little in the worship of God. You should not spend your life thus in vain. Begin at once the worship of the Lord. Our span of life is very short. The most important duty for us in this short life is the worship of God. If we waste our time, we can never regain it. Whatever work you may be engaged in, think of the Lord always. It is not enough if you merely sit in a corner for a short time at a certain period of the day and shut your eyes; for then you will see the whole world coming before your mind's eye.

It is best to start from Dualism. If you proceed a little along this path, you will find that you are naturally led to Non-dualism. To see God outside of ourselves is a right path. Afterwards you will be able to see God within yourself. This is the highest form of meditation. Is not God all-pervading? Until you get the taste of bliss, you should practise meditation. Until then, Dualism is necessary. In the state of *Samadhi,* you will see God alone. None can describe the nature of self-realisation. So long as you have the thought of God in you, sin will not affect you.

XXV

FRAGMENTS OF CONVERSATIONS

i

DEVOTEE—Maharaj, the other day you told me that the mind can be made steady in two ways. Now, which of these two am I to follow?

THE SWAMI—Hold the mind fast to the sacred feet of your *Ishtam* (Chosen Deity).

DEVOTEE—Where shall I meditate upon the blessed form of my *Ishtam?*

THE SWAMI—In the heart.

DEVOTEE—In the heart! And how, venerable Sir?

THE SWAMI—Consider your Deity as facing you while you are in meditation.

DEVOTEE—But in the heart there are flesh and blood; how can a man think of his *Ishtam* there? Is He residing in these things—flesh, bones and blood? Shall I think on Him in this wise?

THE SWAMI—No, do not think of the flesh and bones at all. Your *Ishtam* is residing right in the core of the heart itself; develop this idea and meditate. In the beginning, of course, the consciousness of body will sometimes rise in your mind, but afterwards it will not. You will forget it totally; only the image of the *Ishtam* will then reign supreme in your mind.

DEVOTEE—Shall I think on my *Ishtam* exactly as I find Him in pictures and images? Or in any other way?

THE SWAMI—Not exactly; in a form, but living and luminous.

ii

DEVOTEE—In the Scriptures I have read and also heard from many that *Japam* should be performed, at the same time meditating on the meaning of the *Mantram* (holy Name). Now, how to think on this meaning? Letter by letter, or on the *Mantram* as a whole?

THE SWAMI—Not so. It is just like addressing a man by his name. The moment I address you by your name, your form also flashes into my mind. Similar is the *Mantram* and the form that is born out of it.

DEVOTEE—How shall I perform *Japam?* Mentally or muttering low?

THE SWAMI—When you are alone in a solitary retreat, then do it in a manner as may be audible to you only. If there is anybody nearby, it must be done silently; but the lips must move in either case.

iii

DEVOTEE—For the last few days in my meditation, I clearly perceive the *Mantram* shining forth in letters, bright and effulgent before my eyes. Then I do not see my *Ishtam,* the *Mantram* alone forming the sole object of perception. What shall I do, Sir? Shall I try to think on the image of my *Ishtam* alone, after driving away the *Mantram* from the mind? Or what?

THE SWAMI—That is very good,—an auspicious sign indeed. Yes, surely that is good. But both have to be thought on. The *Mantram* is no other than the Brahman Himself manifested through name. Hence you should not drive it out of the mind. Think on the *Mantram* and also the holy form represented by it. Think on both. It is better not to banish either.

DEVOTEE—Well, Sir, which part of the blessed figure of my *Ishtam* shall I think on first,—the face or any other part?

THE SWAMI—Why, begin from His lotus feet after first offering unto them your salutations; and then face, hands or feet—whatever rises before you.

DEVOTEE—Why is the *Mantram* so very long?

THE SWAMI—True, the *Mantram* sometimes becomes long. But long or short, it possesses a special power; and if you perform *Japam* constantly, you will know the truth of it in no time.

DEVOTEE—Many are of opinion that if at the time of *Japam* and meditation the fourth finger touches the rosary, it constitutes a sin; may I ask you, Sir, why?

THE SWAMI—Do you perform *Japam* with the fourth finger? All right, do as you like. If you like to perform *Japam* with the fourth finger, you can do it without any hesitation. It will not bind you to any sin whatsoever.

iv

DEVOTEE—How shall I steady the mind, Sir?

THE SWAMI—By regular daily practice you can make the mind firm and steady. And for this practice early morning is the best time. Before meditation reading from any of the holy Scriptures will make concentration easier. After meditation half an hour's silent rest is necessary; for at the time of meditation you may not derive the desired effect; it may come a little later. Therefore it is said that if immediately after meditation you divert your attention abruptly to secular affairs, it will not only do you great harm in general, but also it will deter the growth of your mind toward spiritual realisation in particular.

Japam and meditation, these are the food of the mind; and their practice is what constitutes the first and foremost necessity of man. If, in the beginning, you are not able to carry on your *Japam* and meditation in the right way, even then you must not give up the practice altogether. By practice alone you can gain a good deal. Daily two hours' *Japam* and meditation and then half-an-hour's rest is what is required of everybody. Solitary retirement is also a great help to the spiritual aspirant. Simply by sitting silently in the secluded nook of a garden or on the solitary bank of a river, or on the lonely outskirt of a vast, open field, or shut up within your own closet, you can profit much. You must make up a routine before you commence your spiritual practices. And you must not take upon yourself any work which may stand in the way of following the routine.

V

DEVOTEE—If at the time of meditation any form of any god or goddess other than that of my *Ishtam* appears to my mind, what should I do then, Sir?

THE SWAMI—Know it to be a very auspicious sign. Your *Ishtam* Himself may appear to you in various forms. He is one, and at the same time He is many. Enjoy the holy sight of your *Ishtam* and welcome that one which comes in His stead. In the end you will find these different forms merging one by one into the sacred body of your own *Ishtam.*

You must lay much stress on *Japam* and meditation, especially on the *Amavasya, Purnima* and *Ashtami tithis* (the last day of the dark fortnight, the full moon day and the eighth day of either fortnight of the month), and also on the occasions of the worship of Mother Kali (Shyama), Jagaddhatri and Durga. You must also look upon all women as your mother. And instead of giving any positive word to anybody simply say, "I shall try"; for you may not be able to keep to your promise.

DEVOTEE—Maharaj, you are always insisting on the same theme,—"Serve your father". But is it not a most unfortunate thing for me, Sir, that renouncing all, I have not yet been able to become a monk and serve you?

THE SWAMI—Monk! You are already that. The only thing is that you have not taken the *Gerua* (the ochre-coloured dress of a monk). But, my son, *Gerua* alone cannot make you a monk.

DEVOTEE—Is it not a great privilege to be able to join the Holy Order (Sri Ramakrishna Order) and become *Sannyasin* and serve you?

THE SWAMI—Indeed it is; but by serving your sick father, my boy, you will attain to the same result, the greatest good. And if you do not entangle yourself furthermore by marriage or otherwise, you have nothing to fear in this world. I ask you again, my child, devote yourself wholly to your father's service and also to *Japam* and meditation and the study of sacred books.

XXVI

GOD-MINDFULNESS

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, while engaged in Relief Work, I have to labour very hard all day long; I have little or no opportunity to carry on my spiritual practices: I find no time at all; so I do not feel inclined to do such work.

THE SWAMI—But have you to work like that all through?

DISCIPLE—No, Sir, for the first few days only.

THE SWAMI—Then why do you complain that you find no time? It is the ordinary worldling who is often heard to grumble in this strain,—that secular duties stand in the way of spiritual practices. Such flimsy argument, my boy, does not befit you, a *Sadhu.* You have the power of *Brahmacharya* (absolute continence) in you; you must carry on both spiritual practices and mundane duties simultaneously. My idea is that you do not possess any strong desire at heart for spiritual exercises; you only like to pass your time in vain works, and in merriment; your plea of want of time is nothing but a lame excuse. In Relief operations the first few days may be a very busy time for you and I fully appreciate that; but this state of things does not continue for long. What do you do then? Why do you not carry on your *Sadhana* at that time? Do you not feel ashamed to complain in this wise?

Those who are really inclined toward *Sadhana* perform their practices under all circumstances: only they do it more intensely whenever and wherever the opportunity is favourable. Those who always complain of inconveniences of time and place never make any progress in their life; they wander about like vagabonds and spend their precious time in vain.

Engage yourself heart and soul in *Sadhana.* Plunge into your spiritual practices. Oh, the joy of it! If you once have a taste of that joy, all else will lose its savour for you. Then, wherever and in whatever circumstances you may be placed by Providence, you will not relish anything except *Sadhana*. True, in the very beginning you cannot have that joy; but believing in the words of your *Guru*, if you persist in *Sadhana* for some time, the joy of it will descend upon you unsought.

In performing *Japam* and meditation, time and other conditions are indeed necessary, but *Smaran* and *Manan* (constant remembrance and contemplation of God) wait for no such conditions. Whether at work or idle, whether dining or sitting alone, you can always practise these. You must cultivate this habit; and when you become an adept in it, know that you have made a fair advance in mind toward God. According to Sri Ramanuja such an uninterrupted flow of thought is called *Dhyana* (meditation).

I wonder why you are so much afraid of work. (*Pointing to Swami P.*) They are all saintly men; you must do whatever they ask you to do. This will surely bring you good. But if you disobey, you will never make any spiritual advancement.

Therefore I beg you, my boy, to obey them implicitly. This is the sincerest advice that I can give you. What a huge lot of work we had to do under the Divine dispensation! Even as *Sadhus* we had to be involved in litigations and frequently visit lawyers' offices, seeking their legal advice. With all that we cannot say that any evil result has come from our work; for we knew that all work was His.

* * * *

THE SWAMI—(*Seeing a small broken bottle*) That bottle has been broken. This shows a bad habit of mind. You work with an unsettled mind. I fear you think of a hundred other things while engaged in work. But secular or sacred, nothing great can be achieved with an unsteady mind. Whether it is a lofty undertaking or a humble one, it must be done with the utmost care and attention. Let me tell you, those who are steady in secular work are also steady in their spiritual exercises.

If you desire to do work in the right manner, you must hold these two great principles in view. In the first place you must possess a profound regard for the work undertaken, and secondly you must be quite indifferent to the fruits thereof. Then alone can you do work in the proper way. This is called the secret of *Karma-Yoga.* And you can avert all disinclination for work if you only consider it as belonging to God. It is when you forget this secret that you become disturbed in mind; with a disturbed mind, you will not succeed either in advancing spiritually or in secular work.

Under the impulse of name and fame, it is indeed easier to do a magnificent work, but through such work you cannot appraise the value of a man as he really is. In order to do so, you have to examine his daily actions; for it is the ordinary actions of a man which reveal the real man. Through such actions alone can you know how far the man has developed his character. A true *Karma-Yogin* (selfless worker) will lose himself heart and soul in any undertaking, even though it is of a most inferior kind. He is never actuated by the least desire of winning cheap popular applause.

Who cannot do a work if it is his own choice? Where then lies the difference between a *Karma-Yogin* and an ordinary layman? A *Karma-Yogin* must welcome any work that may fall to his share and gradually adjust himself to all requirements. Simply carrying on some work is not sufficient; it must be done disinterestedly—in the holy Name of the Lord. A *Karma-Yogin* must keep three-fourths of his mind fixed on God, and with the remaining one-fourth he should do whatever he has to do. Follow this rule, then alone can you do your work in proper manner; your mind too will become expanded and you will feel great joy in you. But on the other hand, if you work forgetting God, egotism and pride will easily get the better of you and quarrels and dissensions will ensue, disturbing the equanimity of your mind. Therefore I tell you, whether at work or not, never forget God. To maintain this attitude, you must stick to your *Sadhana* (spiritual practices) by all means.

XXVII

ATTACHMENT FOR GOD

DISCIPLE—Sir, is Sri Ramakrishna still living?

THE SWAMI—Have you gone mad? If He does not live, why should we then lead such a life, giving up our home and all? He *is*. Only pour out your whole heart in prayer to Him, and He will stand revealed in His glory to you and will remove all the doubts and confusions that are troubling you constantly.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, do you see Him now?

THE SWAMI—Yes, but only when He is pleased to reveal Himself to us; then alone can we see Him. Everyone can see Him through His grace. But alas! who longs to see Him? How few have that yearning!

DISCIPLE—Venerable Sir, please tell us something about the Master.

THE SWAMI—His is a never-ending story, my boy; and very little of it do we know! You will know Him only when He will be pleased to make you know Him. Bear this in mind; without the concentration of the threefold power,—bodily, mental and spiritual—religious unfoldment is not possible. God realisation is not so easy a task, my son!

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, when I sit for meditation, I find my mind roaming about the whole universe; it thinks on no end of things. How to stop this restlessness of the mind, Sir?

THE SWAMI—In the beginning this always happens, but you must try diligently to check the mad outward course of your mind. You can succeed in the following manner: never begin your meditation immediately after sitting down on your *Asanam* (holy seat). By discrimination first draw the mind back from its external pursuits and lock it up within, at the sacred feet of your *Ishtam;* then begin *Japam* and meditation. If you follow this course for some time, the mind will naturally cease to wander.

The easiest way in this *Kali-Yuga* (Iron Age) is the path of *Japam.* By constantly performing *Japam* the mind can easily be made calm and steady, and finally it will lose itself in the *Ishtam.* The path of *Yoga* and all similar paths are paths to God, but very difficult to follow. Therefore I ask you to perform *Japam* frequently, and along with it think on the *Ishtam;* in doing this you perform both *Japam* and meditation simultaneously. This dual method brings success sooner.

Always perform your *Sadhana* with unswerving steadfastness and do not let a single day pass by without it. Whether you wish or not, sit down on your *Asanam* at the appointed hour every day. If you can carry on your practices for three years with such unerring regularity, I assure you that love and attachment for God will grow in you and you will feel yourself nearer to Him. Then you will be prompted from within to call upon Him and Him alone; you will not be able to turn your mind in any other direction. It is at this stage that the joy of *Sadhana* is felt by an aspirant in his heart.

Without intense love and attachment for God, it is very difficult for a beginner to perform *Sadhana* in the right way, even after retiring into solitude. Being alone, there is always a possibility of serious consequences. Therefore, two of a similar type and temperament should live together; in that case mutual help and guidance may be rendered, should any crisis befall one or the other at any time. But, on the other hand, if the number is more than two, gossip and confusion enter in, and nothing is more injurious to spiritual practice than indulgence in worldly talk. By such idle talk not only does the mind lose its higher tendencies and nobler aspirations, but it is made to forget God, who is the supreme Ideal of human life.

While carrying on spiritual exercises, an aspirant must not beg his food from *Chatrams* (Rest-houses for pilgrims); for these are maintained in greater part with the funds of *Shraddha* (funeral ceremony) given by worldly people with the purpose of serving the holy. A hundred other desires also prompt the minds of the people before subscribing their share to these charitable food-supplying agencies. For all these reasons, a meal supplied by them is not pure. But to live on *Madhukari* (holy begging of food) is very good; it is pure and uncontaminated by any unholy desire.

At the time of *Sadhana,* you must also cut down the quantity of your food to a minimum; With a loaded stomach *Japam* and meditation are not possible because the greater part of your energy will be squandered in digesting the food, and the mind will remain perturbed. That is why moderation in habits, in food and recreation, in everything, has been so strongly enjoined in the Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita. "Yoga is not for him," the Lord says, "who eats too much or too little; nor, O Arjuna, for him who sleeps too much or too little."

Again, if you really want spiritual realisation you must settle down in a particular place and carry on your *Sadhana* uninterruptedly for a length of time. By wandering about you will never gain anything tangible or permanent. This I am telling you from the pages of my own life. But I doubt if you are prepared to profit by my experience.

In this sacred monastery of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) how grand are the facilities for *Sadhana!* Food and clothes, nothing have you to think about. All is ready at hand. Why do you not live here and apply yourself whole-heartedly to a life of constant prayer and meditation? But who will listen to us! No good comes of "vagabondising," my child.

If you think that you can become a *Mahatma* or a great saint by roaming about here and there for some time, let me tell you, you are misguided. You cannot become a saint in that way. Without unceasing practice you cannot have any religious experience; it cannot be had simply by trickery. If you sincerely cherish a longing for God-realisation, you must plunge into *Sadhana* and be completely lost in your practice. Without sincere *Sadhana* what good will come out of your wandering about from place to place, though dressed in the sacred *Gerua* and living on holy begging?

XXVIII

WHAT A SADHU SHOULD DO

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, I have been trying in various ways to bring my senses under control but all are of no avail; will you tell me how I can succeed in my attempt?

THE SWAMI—"I will conquer lust, I will conquer anger, greed"—if you try in this way, you will never conquer them; but if you can concentrate your mind on God, the senses will of themselves be curbed without much effort on your part. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, the more you proceed eastwards, the further are you from the west; you have not to spend any energy to accomplish this. Take up this direct method; call upon God and pray to Him; then the senses will lose their venomous sting in no time.

The way in which you perform *Japam* and meditation is most superficial. With such casual effort, by an hour's practice or two, God can never be realised. But if you can lose yourself day and night in the contemplation of God, His Name and glory, then alone will you be blessed with vision of Him; otherwise not. That is the only way: be plunged in *Sadhana* heart and soul; no more waste of time.

In the primary stage of your *Sadhana* you should go on increasing your *Japam* and meditation slowly and steadily, little by little. If today you spend an hour, a few days after add a little more time; again a few days later, devote still more, and so on. In this way you should lengthen the time of your spiritual practice, more and more every day. But in momentary enthusiasm you must never increase your *Japam* and meditation by leaps and bounds. If you violate this law, I warn you, you will suffer badly: the reaction from the sudden increase will be too severe for you to bear unmoved; consequently you are likely to undergo terrible depression of mind. Then you will have no more inclination for *Japam* and meditation. It is an arduous task to lift up a depressed mind and turn it back to *Sadhana* once again.

In all spiritual realisation His grace is most essential; without that no progress is possible. Therefore, for His grace you must pray to Him with an eager heart. Prayer has a wonderful efficacy of its own; also it is pleasing to God.

In the beginning of your *Sadhana* you must not let yourself be swayed by any desire for enjoyment. For you, *now* is the time for complete abstinence, for controlling all desires. By the grace of the Lord when you are once well established in this practice, then you will have no more fear of being stained by desires, should they rise in your mind at any time.

Again, those who have embraced the life of a monk after giving up their home and all, for them it is most unworthy to be actuated by the desire to exercise authority over others. For a monk such a motive is the root-cause of falling again into bondage. Therefore you must be very careful about this pitfall. Whatever you may do or see, look upon it as belonging to God and upon yourself as an instrument in His hand. Remember the words of the Gita, "Being deluded by egotism, man calls himself the doer."

Lying is yet another great sin. Even a drunkard or a man who frequents places of ill fame can be trusted, but not the one who lies. It is the blackest of all sins in this world.

You must never find fault with others nor criticise them. Such a habit is extremely detrimental to one's own good. By thinking of the evil qualities of others day and night, they will be impressed on your own mind; and that, at the cost of the good tendencies that you may possess. So there is no good in fault-finding! Rather, sing His glory and mix heartily with all and rejoice. But who will listen to this advice? It is very bad for *Sadhus* to sit in groups to find fault with others and launch a malicious crusade against them. None but the low-minded take part in such shameful actions!

Always cultivate the habit of looking at the goodness of a man and doing him honour and praising him, even though only a slight trace of goodness is to be found in him. Take it from me, my boy, if you do not show due regard for other's greatness, your mind will never expand, nor will you ever be called great by others.

It is not honest on the part of a *Sadhu* to accept a householder's offerings without performing *Sadhana* in return. The householder supplies him with food and provisions, because he is expected to carry on his *Sadhana* exclusively, withdrawing himself from all other pursuits of life. Without *Sadhana*, therefore, you must not take a householder's service; if you disobey this rule, know that you do so at your own cost. The acceptance of holy alms, in whatever shape, from a householder entitles the latter to a share of the former's religious merit. Therefore a *Sadhu* must accumulate as much merit as will leave a decent remainder after meeting this charge.

Man is composed of both good and bad tendencies; so do not slight another because only the evil ones are visible to you; but, considering him as your own counterpart, try to rectify him and by love draw him towards the good. Then only do you deserve to be called a man. What is the use of crying down a fellow-being!

* * * *

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, on some days during my meditation my mind of itself becomes calm and steady, while on others I cannot make it so, try as I may; it runs about to and fro; how to make it steady, Sir?

THE SWAMI—As you see ebb and flow in the tide of the Ganges, my son, even so is the case with everything in this world. Your *Sadhana* too has its ebb and flow. In the beginning, however, this is not to be wondered at. But stick to your *Sadhana.* If you can carry it on for some time, the ebb and flow will stop and your mind will flow in a smooth and unobstructed current.

Whenever you feel that the mind is calm and steady, then leaving aside all work engage yourself deeply in *Sadhana.* Again when you are perturbed in mind and do not feel calm, then also you must sit for your usual daily exercises, and try to bring the mind under control through discrimination. The mind does not become steady all at once. You have to struggle and struggle every moment. Through struggle the mind and senses and intellect, all will surely come under control.

Remember, my child, since you are a *Sadhu,* you are expected to be calm and gentle and modest and fair-spoken; goodness must flow out through every word you utter, every action you perform, through your behaviour and movements. By their contact with you, others must attain peace of mind and be drawn toward God and goodness.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, we hear of the spiritual current of holy places; may I know what that means, Sir?

THE SWAMI—Yes, every place of pilgrimage has a time when the spiritual current begins to flow. At such a time the mind can be easily pacified by means of *Japam* and meditation, and also you will feel a great joy at heart.

DISCIPLE—How to know that time, Sir?

THE SWAMI—Oh, that is not so difficult to know; a sincere man can easily catch it at a slightly advanced stage of his *Sadhana.*

Regarding Kashi (Benares), it is wholly beyond the ordinary world; it is a place of mighty spiritual consciousness. Whatever *Sadhana* you perform here will multiply itself tenfold; also the dormant lion of *Mantram* awakens very soon in this sacred place. In Kashi, the land of eternal freedom, Lord Viswanath bestows salvation unasked on all, great or small, rich or poor, virtuous or vicious, on all alike. He who can procure an honest living in this thrice blessed home of spirituality is indeed a man among men.

XXIX

NAME OF THE LORD

THE SWAMI—Do you perform prayer and meditation now?

DEVOTEE—No, Sir. Not at all.

THE SWAMI—It is better to do a little every day. That will give you peace of mind and steadiness. I am sure you have a family *Guru;* why have you not taken initiation from him? You had better receive it from him soon. Every day you should perform a little *Japam* and meditation. Purchase a string of *Rudraksha* beads; dip it in the holy waters of the Ganges and touch the sacred Feet of Lord Viswanath with it; then perform *Japam* with that a hundred and eight or a thousand times daily. If you like to do more, you can safely do so; and you should.

DEVOTEE—What shall I repeat, Sir?

THE SWAMI—The blessed Name of the Lord! Among His various Names that one which inspires the greatest faith and devotion in you—that is the Name you should choose for your *Japam*.

DEVOTEE—Again, without a form, meditation is not possible; what form shall I meditate upon, and where?

THE SWAMI—You must meditate upon that one of the many forms of Him you like best. You can place Him in the heart or outside. A wise *Guru*, however, will understand the particular form of God that calls forth the greatest faith and regard from the disciple, and will instruct him to meditate on that.

Then there is mental worship. As you do external worship with offerings of flowers, sandal paste, burning of camphor, exactly so is the worship in the mind. In the mind you have to picture the form of Deity you choose, in the mind you are to offer all the holy things used in worship, and in the mind again you have to adore Him with all the reverence and devotion of your heart in humble supplication. You have heard enough; now do something and show your worthiness. No more waste of time; begin from this day —this very evening. For the present do these two things: *Japam* and meditation every morning and evening without fail, and continue this habit for a couple of years at least. Then you will find great joy; you will come to us more frequently, and will know more and more of spiritual mysteries.

So much for the present. I shall tell you in time what more practices you have to take up. Now you need not bother yourself about the mental worship; leave it for the time being. After your formal initiation, if I think you should do it, I will tell you. Regarding initiation itself, you need not worry over that at this stage. Now only do as much as instructed and nothing more. No more wasting of time, my child; begin this very day, and go bravely on.

Procure a new *Asanam* or rug to sit upon; keep it apart to be used solely for meditation, worship and such things. Also choose a solitary retreat for your meditation and *Sadhana;* your garden house, I imagine, stands in a very lonely place. If you feel inconvenient or disturbed at home, now and then retire there at night. Remember always that here in this sacred city of Kashi, spiritual realisation is easily attainable. If you can carry on your *Sadhana* for two years at a stretch, I am sure you will gain, some realisation. There are those who have attained still sooner—in a year even. So begin now, and after the lapse of some time you will feel so much joy at heart that you will like to meditate more and more.

Frequent holy places, study sacred books, and come to me now and then. While meditating, sit erect and cross-legged, and hold your hands near your chest or the upper abdomen. Do not begin your meditation immediately after taking your posture; sit silently for a couple of minutes or so, and try to make the mind calm, so that no alien thoughts may cross it; then only is meditation to be begun in right earnest. For a year or two you will have to exert your mind to the limit of its power; thereafter meditation will become natural to you. If any day you are hard pressed with work, that day you may sit for meditation only once, or may finish it in a few minutes, say, in ten or fifteen minutes. In the event of greater pressure, fix your mind on God for a moment, then bow down to Him and close your meditation. You can do this in exceptional cases, but not always.

Before your morning service wash your hands and face and dress yourself in clean freshly washed clothes; then sit for your practice. You may also take a little of the sacred Ganges water. In the evening also, follow the same routine. I assure you once more, if you do these things regularly, you will enjoy great peace of mind and will live happily.

Regarding moral conduct, observe these two rules; speak the truth always, and honour and worship all women as mother. Nothing more need you trouble yourself with now. The observance of these two rules will make all other moral rules living through your life.

Believe in the existence of God, and never say He does not exist. I tell you, my child, God *is*. Therefore hold fast to Him in sincere devotion and in lowliness of spirit and pray and pray! No more speculations, no more waste of time, no more idleness; begin now, this very day, and move forward. I will see to the rest.

XXX

THE PROCESS OF MEDITATION

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, some meditate on the Ideal in the heart, some think of it in the head; I see it outside as I see you. Which is the proper way, Sir?

THE SWAMI—The process of meditation differs according to the differences in *Sadhana.* Ordinarily it is better to meditate on the Ideal in the heart. The body should be considered as the temple and God as residing in it. When the mind becomes steady through continued spiritual practices, then alone can a man have a vision of his *Ishtam* (Chosen Deity); and wherever he realises Him—head or heart—there he can carry on his meditation with ease.

Through persistence in meditation the first experience that a man gets is the perception of a hallowed effulgence; and simultaneously with that experience or a little later, a kind of higher and nobler joy is felt and the mind is reluctant to move onward, leaving that joy. But if one goes further, he sees the effulgence taking more definite form, and the mind tends to merge itself in that form of consciousness. Sometimes the mind can be completely obliterated by continuously hearing the long, sacred sound of the *Pranava* (Om, the sound symbol of Brahman).

Spiritual realisation knows no bounds! The more you know, the more yet remains to be known. It is unbounded, infinite! By experiencing a little of that effulgence, many think they have reached the end; but the fact is quite otherwise. According to some, again, when the mind ceases to be active, then true religion begins; but others believe that that is the end.

DISCIPLE—Generally we find that the mind, after making some progress along the spiritual path cannot advance further: what makes it stop, venerable Sir?

THE SWAMI—The weakness of the mind is solely responsible for this mental torpor. According to its capacity the mind moves on to a certain point, then stops; it cannot advance more. All minds are not of the same capacity, although all can be and must be developed. Sri Ramakrishna has said that through *Brahmacharya* the mind can be strengthened more and more; and a strong mind never wavers even when overtaken by lust and anger. To such a mind these passions are trifles. It is firmly convinced that these can do it no harm. Many are the pitfalls that stand in the way of *Sadhana*. External troubles are negligible compared to the internal. Hence the many injunctions for *Asanam* (posture) and *Mudra* (position of fingers) in religious worship.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, you call each one of us to you and inquire about our spiritual progress and our difficulties. You give us new courage and enthusiasm. Your encouragement takes away all fear and anxiety and makes us bold and uncompromising.

THE SWAMI—Such an attitude of mind does not always come, my child. At times, of course, the mind is in such a state that I feel I could entreat you all one by one, even touching your feet and saying, "Do this, my son, do this, I implore you." But again I think, "Who am I to instruct you in all this; the Lord is there; and as He makes us do, so is it done. Whom to ask! The Lord Himself is the cause; the Lord Himself is the instrument, and He Himself is all!" Why should people take my words even though they ask me! But then you know, my boy, when the inspiration comes from within, then people do take them and follow them.

Strive on, my son, strive on and on; do not waste a moment. At the close of each day Sri Ramakrishna wept and prayed: "Mother, another day is gone and I am not yet blest with Thy vision!" Even so yearn after God, my child, and be lost in Him!

XXXI

TRUE VISION

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, is grace conditional?

THE SWAMI—Sri Ramakrishna has said that when it is hot, man fans himself; but when the cool breeze sets in, he stops fanning. Even so with grace.

DISCIPLE—What is the distinction between the true vision of God and hallucination? How to distinguish them, Sir?

THE SWAMI—From the true vision of God results a lasting bliss; one's own mind knows it instinctively.

DISCIPLE—Maharaj, what is the necessity of *Mudra* (position of fingers) and other rituals in formal worship?

THE SWAMI—The mind is disturbed by many evil influences. The right sort of *Mudra* helps the worshipper in warding them off. Sometimes you may think that you are all right and that, if you meditate, your mind will become concentrated. But as you sit for meditation, within five minutes various distractions crop up in the mind and shake its balance. Once an evil thought rose in me, and as I approached the Master, from a distance He divined it, and said: "My boy, I see that an evil thought is disturbing your mind." So saying, he placed his hand on my head in blessing and uttered some words inaudibly; within five minutes it had gone! When the mind moves on higher planes, no evil influence can reach there and agitate it.

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DISCIPLE—Maharaj, I have heard that meditation should be preceded by the worship of the *Guru;* but I do not know how to conduct it; pray tell me how, Sir!

THE SWAMI—It is not essential; the worship of the *Ishtam* is enough.

DISCIPLE—Pray tell me how to worship the *Guru.*

THE SWAMI—You can learn how from Swami P.

DISCIPLE—No, Sir, I beg you to tell me; he may not tell me at all.

THE SWAMI—Very well; at first, you should meditate upon the *Guru* in the heart; then after a while imagine him as merging himself in the *Ishtam;* then begin to repeat the sacred name of your *Ishtam* and meditate upon His blessed form; and thus continue.

XXXII

WHAT IS TAPASYA?

[His Holiness Swami Brahmananda spent the last days of his life on this earth in the Head Monastery of the Ramakrishna Mission on the bank of the Ganges above Calcutta. The conversation which follows took place during this time. It was the evening of the 17th of March, 1922. The venerable figure of the Swami was seated on the eastern verandah of the Math (monastery). A group of disciples sat on the floor in front of him. As the older *Sadhus* of the Order finished their evening meditation, they came one by one to bow at the Swami's feet in reverent salutation. The stillness of prayer and contemplation was in the air, broken only by the murmur of swift-flowing waters and the faint sound of Vesper chants from surrounding temples. Suddenly through the silence came the question, "Maharajji, what is meant by *Tapasya?"*]

THE SWAMI—There are different kinds of

Tapasya. Some take a vow that they will not sit for a long period. I have seen a man who had taken a vow not to sit for twelve years. At that time he had almost finished that period—only five or six months were remaining. By constantly standing, his legs had grown very stout as in elephantiasis. For sleeping he held to a rope. The rope was tied to both ends of a wooden piece, holding to which the man slept at night. There are other kinds of *Tapasya.* In the winter season, one stands all night up to the neck in very cold water and spends the time in making *Japam!* In very hot weather one sits and meditates in the midst of five blazing *Dhunies* under a burning sun. In another kind one stands or sits in meditation on a seat with pointed nails.

DEVOTEE—Is this true *Tapasya,* Maharaj?

THE SWAMI—Heaven knows! These people do these things with some motive. They hope they will become kings; or enjoy the world in their next birth. They have admitted this to me.

DEVOTEE—Do they get these results?

THE SWAMI—Heaven knows!

DEVOTEE—Then what is real *Tapasya?*

THE SWAMI—Real *Tapasya* is not in such feats. Any one can do these things by practice. It is very easy to conquer the body; but to conquer the mind is the greatest difficulty—to conquer lust, greed, desire for name and fame. Real *Tapasya* lies in three things: (1) You must be very truthful. Truth is the pillar to which you must *always* hold. Every inch of you must be truthful. (2) You must get rid of lust. (3) You must gain control over your *Vasanas*. These are the main things to be observed. Of these the second is the most important, that is, *Brahmacharya*. Real *Tapasya* lies here. Our Shastras say that by observing *Brahmacharya* for twelve years very strictly, God becomes easy to realise. This is very difficult. I can tell you from my own experience I have learned that no true meditation is possible without real *Brahmacharya.* It is very difficult to get control over the *Sukshma Vasanas,* so the rules for *Sannyasins* are very strict. The *Sannyasin* should not even look at a woman. By seeing one, a picture is formed in the mind. When we see anything beautiful to the senses, our natural instinct is to enjoy it. So we unconsciously enjoy in our mind. This is very injurious. If a *Sadhu* sees a woman in a dream or gets night pollution, he has to make *Prayaschittam.* He has to take little food the next day or no food at all and he has to make penance by making *Japam* for thousands of times. Without *Brahmacharya* the mind will not gain the power to meditate. The mind will be thinking of this or that and will not think of His feet. You will not get the correct imagination. When you develop *Brahmacharya* you will see everything in a different light. Everything will look fresh to you. By observing *Brahmacharya, Ojas* is aroused in you. Science also says the same thing. Semen, they say, is produced from blood, and the best part of blood.

DEVOTEE—It is a pity that nobody with authority speaks about these things to our young boys.

THE SWAMI—Formerly young boys lived with their *Gurus* and they had to observe *Brahmacharya*. After a time they could go home and marry; but if they married, they continued to observe certain rules of *Brahmacharya*, that in the *Grihastha Ashrama* life they might produce strong and healthy children. If they became *Sannyasins*, they went to the forest and meditated on God.

DEVOTEE—These ideas about *Brahmacharya* are known only among Brahmin boys. As young boys they are called *Brahmacharis*, but now it has become a mere farce. Maharajji, cannot these ideas be made known to all castes?

THE SWAMI—Yes, but *Brahmacharya* should be accompanied by *Japam*. Otherwise *Brahmacharya* cannot stand.

LETTERS
AND
STRAY COUNSELS

XXXIII

LETTER TO A DISCIPLE

BHADRAK, BALASORE

DEAR A.——,

I am glad to learn from your letter that by the grace of the Lord, you have a desire to spend some time in *Sadhana* (spiritual practices) and have secured a convenient place for your practice. Everything has come out all right. You are yet young. Make the best use of this opportunity. Do not waste your valuable time. Instead of bothering yourself with big metaphysical problems, apply yourself steadily to *Sadhana* and you will realise the truth. Have faith and go ahead. You will not achieve anything without steady practice. Even if you spend your whole life in the study of philosophical questions, you will not be able to derive any benefit. Now that all things are favourable, settle down quietly to *Sadhana* at least for a year. Your body and mind will become pure and you will realise many things through God's grace.

My advice is: give your mind wholly to Him without any other thought. Engage yourself always in *Dhyanam* (meditation), *Japam* (repeating the holy Name) and *Smaran-Manan* (constant remembrance and contemplation). Do not indulge in idle talk and gratuitous advice to others. You have strength of body and your mind is not yet burdened with unholy impressions. Now is the time to do spiritual practices. It is easier to give the mind a good shape when it is still pure and plastic. You have such a mind. Therefore plunge deep in *Sadhana* and pray to God with a yearning heart. He will solve all your doubts and difficulties. If you miss this opportunity, it will be extremely difficult for you to do anything afterwards.

As far as possible I am giving you suitable answers to all your questions below. If you can follow them for some time at least, you will surely be blessed and many of your life's problems will solve themselves.

Q—How many hours in the day should we spend in *Japam* and meditation and how many again in *Puja* (worship) and the study of Scriptures?

A—The more time you can spend in all these, the better for you. Those who lead a purely meditative life should spend at least sixteen hours in *Japam* and *Dhyanam*. As you continue your practice, you will be able to prolong this period. The more the mind is turned inward, the greater will be the joy. Once you get a taste of it, the desire for it will grow stronger and stronger. Then your mind itself will tell you how long you are to devote to *Sadhana*. Before this stage is reached, it is desirable that you should give at least two-thirds of your daily practice to *Japam* and *Dhyanam*. The rest of the time should be spent in reading sacred books and examining the various thoughts which rise in the mind at the time of your meditation. You should further see that good thoughts are sifted from the evil ones. Then gradually all unholy thoughts are to be eliminated and replaced one by one by holy thoughts, and these again analysed with great care and serious-ness. In this way, when all the disturbing elements of the mind are controlled and well-regulated, you can attain the state of real meditation. Simply closing the eyes and counting your beads or casually thinking on God will not bring you the desired object—God-realisation.

Intense and serious thinking on God is what is required of those who long for eternal peace and happiness. The object of meditation is to make the mind calm and serene. And if you do not succeed in this or get any joy therefrom, you are to know that your meditation is not directed in the proper channel. One other point also I should like to impress on your mind. That is this: whoever is supplying you with food and other necessaries is entitled to a share of your merit; therefore acquire so much as will leave you a decent balance after meeting this charge.

Q—What should I do when at times the mind seems unwilling to meditate; should I then study sacred books or try to engage the mind perforce in meditation?

A—In the preliminary stages you must force your mind to meditate in order to cultivate a strong habit. The very nature of the mind is to shirk work, always seeking for ease and comfort. But if you really yearn for peace eternal, you have to labour hard. If you feel uncomfortable to sit for a long time at a stretch, then lie down on your bed and begin to perform your *Japam;* and again, if you are sleepy, do it walking about. Anyhow, keep the mind always engaged in the thought of God. On the other hand, if you let loose your mind, you will never be able to cultivate the firm habit without which spiritual progress is impossible. Carry on, therefore, a regular fight with the mind and give it a firm shape. This is *Sadhana;* and the end of all *Sadhanas* is to bring the mind under control.

Q—Are the processes of *Hatha-Yoga, Pranayama* (control of breath), *Asana* (sitting posture), etc., more or less necessary for my spiritual practices? If so, how much time should be devoted to these?

A—For the present no such practices are necessary for you. What is most essential is to meditate on God and God alone and pray to Him incessantly with a devout heart. The real thing is to be in constant touch with Him. Therefore try to follow this rule and He will lead you to do whatever is best for you.

As regards the practice of *Hatha-Yoga,* you must keep yourself aloof from it or you will feel the consequences. It is a most dangerous path without the help of a competent guide. If you have a very strong desire for it, you can do it only when you happen to live with some one of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, and then strictly under his direction and guidance.

Q—How long should a *Sadhaku* (one who is doing spiritual practices) sleep? Beyond his usual period of sleep, can he spend a little more time to give his body and mind rest?

A—Ordinarily four hours' sleep is quite sufficient for a *Sadhaka* in good health; and sleep for more than five hours is not rest but a disease. It does great harm. By no means should a spiritual aspirant sleep away his time. As youth is the most favourable time for *Sadhana*—when both the body and the mind are strong—a *Sadhaka* must turn it to good account. During this time he must store up such an amount of spiritual energy that it will lead him safely through the most unsafe paths of life to peace and happiness. Therefore if you cannot make progress along the paths of spiritual life now, it will be hardly possible for you to do anything afterwards. You are yet young, my boy. Give a good shape to your mind. Lose yourself heart and soul in *Sadhana* and make the best use of your time. You will get enough time for sleep and gossip later on.

If anybody is asked to labour hard in *Sadhana*, he will at once produce a number of lame excuses. He will say that the body is very weak and that rest is necessary. All this is insincerity. He should know that the sense organs of those who are methodical in their spiritual practices and who lead a strictly regular life, become so adjusted that four hours' rest is quite enough to keep the body healthy and in tune. By leading an irregular life, people generally tax their body and mind so heavily that even a period of eight or ten hours' sleep is too short to refresh their system. Therefore what I ask you, my boy, is this—regulate your life by every means and then your body and mind will be fresh and active. Waste no more time. Do something if you really yearn for things divine. Idle talk and lofty metaphysical speculations bring no good unless translated into action.

Q—What rules are to be observed regarding food? Shall I accept whatever is offered to me or make any distinction? Which is better, *Madhukari* (food gathered by begging from house to house like a bee) or food brought by chance?

A—At the time of *Sadhana*, a little discrimination in food is necessary. There are some kinds of food which produce sleep, drowsiness, etc.; they are the worst enemies to a *Sadhaka;* therefore it is always advisable not to take them. To eat too much sweet or sour food is bad, and *Kolai-dal* or any preparation of it is also very harmful to the growth of the spiritual life. Foods such as these stir up the *Tamas* (dullness) in man. As a result he feels drowsy at the time of meditation and cannot make any progress in the spiritual path.

An aspirant must be very careful about his diet and eat only such foods as are easily digestible. Under no circumstances must he fill more than two thirds of his stomach. This will increase his strength and energy and he will be able to devote them to good account. But if the stomach is overloaded, he will have to spend all his energy in digesting his food. He will find no energy or inclination for meditation. Moreover, it may tell upon his health; for, as you know full well, good health is favourable to *Sadhana.* So guard it by all means and care for it now, when everything is in your favour.

As regards *Madhukari,* it is very pure food. It does not bind you to any obligations. But if you accept food from a particular person, it binds; and a fraction of your merit will go to that person. *Madhukari* is specially beneficial to those who cannot continue the flow of meditation without break and consequently require some time for diversion. Instead of whiling away their time of diversion in idle talk, if they utilise it in *Madhukari,* they are thereby not only saved from the sin of killing time in vain, but they also keep themselves free from the obligation of giving a portion of their merit in return for their food from any particular person.

Q—Is the vow of silence necessary at the time of *Sadhana?* If so, what is to be done when some unavoidable circumstances compel one to break it, or if the mind becomes irritated because of it?

A—No, the vow of silence is not required as you understand it. Forced silence and wild indulgence in talk both have their evil effects on man. To be silent in mind is surely better than external silence, so always try to follow the former. Moreover, instead of binding yourself by any forced silence, if you talk only so much as is required, it will not only do you no harm, but will give you the same result as is attained by one observing absolute silence.

Q—How much clothing should a *Sadhaka*

require? And to what extent should heat and cold be borne? If anybody offers any clothes to protect the body from the ravages of heat and cold, should they be accepted?

A—As for clothing, you should keep only as much as is barely necessary to keep the body healthy and protect it from heat and cold; but bear in mind that if those of delicate health practise many austerities, they will have their deserts. Your ideal is to realise God, not to bear unnecessary hardships. As for the acceptance of any offer, you must sincerely judge of that with reference to your utmost necessity. You may accept an offer only when you really feel a want for it; otherwise reject it at once. To accept anything from any body for the purpose of hoarding is a sin unpardonable in a *Sadhaka.*

Q—I know that both your noble self and the Lord have endless grace for me. Only bless me to realise it fully and well. Bless me also that my faith and devotion to you may be firm and unflinching. As I feel I have no power to do anything without your help, will you not make me do as it pleases you, venerable Sir?

A—There is infinite strength in you. Never lose faith in yourself, my boy; God is in you. And His grace too. He is gracious to all. Know for certain that it is through His endless grace alone that you are able to be here under the banner of the Ramakrishna Order. It is again through His grace that you have found a good man to give you food and shelter during the period of your *Sadhana*. Have faith, therefore; have firm faith in Him. Work hard with unshakable determination and He will give you all knowledge. Strive unceasingly. You will know Him and you will realise His endless grace. Do not spend your time in vain. Go on with your *Sadhana* as instructed by them—the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna—and continue it till you realise Him in this very life. Do not be troubled with big questions any more. Do something positive. Make the best of this opportunity and be blessed.

I have answered all your questions. Now try to live them in your life. From your letter I understand that the gentleman who has been giving you food and shelter is really a devotee. Rich men seldom spend money in good deeds; and those that do so are very few in number. Your host has been doing so much for you; see that his money is not wasted. You should live there in such a way that from your conduct his inclination to spend more in good deeds may be gradually increased. As your benefactor will have a share of your merit and demerit both, do there only such work as will not make him suffer hereafter. Take care; do not run after name and fame. Those things you could have had in plenty at home. But once you have come out of their clutches, try your utmost not to fall a prey to them again. Pray to Him with a sincere heart that even the least taint of desire for name and fame may not soil your good heart.

My love and best wishes to you and to our friend, your kind host. I always pray to the Lord that your desire may be fulfilled. May He give you good sense and make a man of you.

XXXIV

LETTER TO A DISCIPLE

PURI, SASHI NIKETANA.

DEAR A——,

Received your letter and also B's. His motive is not clear. He does not wish to marry. He wants to serve his country. That is all right, but it appears to me that it is all due to want of assimilation of his Western education. I do not know how far it is possible to serve others and country before one's character is well formed. My belief is that the man who cannot solve his own problem will not be able to be of much use to others Anyhow the body is good and if he leads a pure life, he may get a taste for a higher life.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Fix thy hold firmly on God and perform thy worldly duties; then thou shalt be free from all dangers." Again He said: "In the play of hide-and-seek, if the player succeeds in touching the grand-dame (Boori), he is no longer a 'thief'. Similarly by once seeing God we are no longer bound by the fetters of the world."

You should always bear in mind that the goal of life is to realise God. First of all know Him; let your faith and devotion to His feet become strong. Then you may do whatever you wish to do. So long as you live you will have to do some kind of work. Even if you have no difficulties for your own maintenance, you will be doing something either for the sake of your body, or impelled by your ego or your past *Samskaras* (impressions). Therefore when you must work, it is better to do such things as will bring peace to your own mind and benefit to others. Those who have taken shelter under His feet and obtained His grace never go wrong. Every word spoken by them, every act done by them, leads to the good of humanity.

It is good to remain unmarried. Those who keep *Brahmacharya* gain extraordinary powers. Only through such men do supernatural or divine powers manifest themselves. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "The heart of the devotee is God's drawing-room." If we wish to become His devotees and servants we must become pure; for only in pure hearts can He reside. He is far beyond the reach of the impure. When your mind and heart become as pure as clear glass, then only God can reside in you; then only can you claim to be His servant, His devotee, His dependent or child. Just as a bright clear mirror gives a good reflection, so does a pure heart manifest Him truly. Therefore I tell you who are young and free from all stain, instal Him in your heart and allow no other thing to enter there. It is not possible to know Him except through pure and holy living. In this life you can realise Him by this way only.

The boy is good and has some auspicious marks on him. He can make spiritual progress if he perseveres. To get a B.A. or M.A. degree, to become a barrister and make some money, is not a very high ideal in life and gives but temporary enjoyment. It will not help one to attain God, the goal of human life. First of all form your character and make it perfect. Then whatever you may undertake, you will accomplish easily. If in studying religious books you can spend even one-twelfth of the time wasted in preparing for your B.A. or M.A. degree, you will imbibe many thoughts and ideas of the higher life. Students generally complain that they have no time when they are asked to read the sacred books. My dear boy, if you wish to become a man and live in eternal happiness, plunge into deep meditation and resolve to realise Him or die in the attempt.

Those who want worldly enjoyment let them become B.A's. and M.A's. But those who care only for Supreme Bliss, have no need of university degrees. Sri Ramakrishna used to speak of *Granthas* (books) as *Granthis* (knots). This does not, of course, include the Shastras, Swamiji's works, etc. Reading purely secular books makes people vain, excites evil propensities in them and takes them far away from God. Any book which does not induce devotion and faith in God, however entertaining for the time being, will ultimately cause misery. The egotism arising from B.A., M.A., etc., drags one away from God.

The possession of wealth also works similar mischief. Money does more harm than good.

Neither in the sleeping nor waking state could Sri Ramakrishna touch a coin. What He has taught us by His own life is that there is no other path to attain God but through *Tyaga* (renunciation). By running after sense enjoyments, man becomes degraded to the level of the brute. If you want to be a man, practise renunciation; love and realise Him. Renouncing momentary pleasures fits you for Supreme Happiness. By renunciation is meant giving up all sense pleasures of this life. Take shelter at the lotus feet of the Lord; become mad with love and devotion for Him. Look at the life of Sri Ramakrishna and be a man in the best sense of the term.

Renunciation alone can give you peace. Renounce all for His sake. Make God your own and pray to Him: "Thou art my father, Thou art my mother, Thou art my brother, Thou art my sister, Thou art my all." Giving up all thoughts of enjoyment in this life, when you are able to pass day and night in constant thought of Him and prayer to Him, you will feel infinite joy and become a man. That joy cannot be conveyed through words. The human heart is too small to hold it. When that state of joy is attained, His grace, His love and His presence will always be felt by you.

Three things are essential for the realisation of God—human birth, desire for salvation and the company of holy men. By the grace of God you have all three. Now make the best use of them and attain the supreme object of human birth. What is the good of running after fleeting pleasures when you can attain eternal peace and happiness? Renouncing everything, you have taken refuge at His lotus feet with the noble aspiration of realising Him; see therefore that your life is not spent in vain. Remember this, my boy, it is possible to be born again as man and have spiritual yearning as well; but I can assure you, that the company of such holy men (disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) as you enjoy now is a rare privilege and you cannot expect to have it always. The blessing of such holy company comes as a result of great merit, accumulated during many births. Therefore make the best use of this opportunity instead of wasting your life in worthless pursuits.

Faith, intense faith, in the words of your *Guru* will make everything easy for you. Without this all forms and rituals of religion are useless. So surrender yourself absolutely to your *Guru* as a kitten does to its mother. He will then look after you and provide you with everything; yours is only to have simple faith alone.

How far can your intellect go? He who has taken your burden on himself, has a sense of responsibility and feels anxious for your welfare much more than you do. He will save you from dangers and difficulties. No evil can befall a faithful disciple who is under the protecting wings of the *Guru.*

Men will surely go wrong so long as they do not realise God. But if they surrender themselves to the *Guru,* the chances of committing error will be much less. Remember Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the father and the son walking over narrow ridges across the fields. If the father himself takes hold of the son's hand, there is no fear of the latter slipping off his feet; but if the son tries to take hold of the father's hand, there is a chance of his falling down. Let those who have the grace of a competent *Guru* rest content, leaving it to him to cure them of all their faults.

Renunciation being the vital factor in attaining peace and happiness, everything should be given up for the sake of God. Unbroken *Brahmacharya* (continence) is also requisite for one seeking the Lord. A man without continence is no better than an animal. Discrimination is the trait which distinguishes man from the brute. Man can realise God if he strives for it, but the brute cannot, being a complete slave of the senses.

If you wish to possess real peace and happiness and taste joy and cheerfulness in this very life, hold fast to God, giving up your all. Do not think renunciation consists in wandering about with a pair of tongs in hand and smearing the body with ashes. The outward marks of *Tyaga* (renunciation) meant for show bring no good; rather are they harmful. Real renunciation consists in complete surrender of one's self to the will of God. Pray to Him saying: "Lord! my body, my mind and everything are Thine; Thou mayest use them as Thou wilt." Have you not heard that Sri Ramakrishna knew nothing but the Divine Mother, and that whatever He did was according to Her will and guidance? So always pray to God, "Lord, I do not know what is good and what is bad; I am merely Thy servant; let Thy will be done."

Struggle incessantly to make this attitude permanent. If you surrender yourself completely unto God, He will do through you all that is needful. Therefore pray, ever pray to Him and take shelter at His feet. One thing more I wish to impress upon your mind. Whether you are praised or blamed, honoured or insulted, whether there be a place in the world for you or no, whether your body stands or falls, once you have understood that the end and aim of human life is to realise God, do not swerve an inch from this ideal. Say to yourself with firm determination: "I must realise God here and now, at any cost."

It is only when you can cast your life in this mould that you can be a man, a true and worthy child of Sri Ramakrishna. Your *Sat-Sanga* (company of holy men) will then bear fruit and you will be blessed. Otherwise your life will be wasted; and between you and the brute there will be no difference. You will not deserve to be called a worthy son of Sri Ramakrishna.

One other point which I wish you to bear in mind always, is this. Ordinary people understand by the term *Guru,* a person who whispers some *Mantram* into the ear of the disciple. They do not care whether he possesses all the qualifications of a true Master. But today such a conception is losing ground. It is now being recognised that none but a realised soul is qualified to be a spiritual teacher. He who does not know the path himself cannot show it to others. *Mantras* are today as potent as ever; but those who trade in spiritual lore are ignorant of the rules governing them and they themselves are not able to make any real progress. Much less so their disciples. How then can they obtain real peace and happiness?

Sri Ramakrishna has turned the tide. The most invaluable spiritual gems are to be found among his disciples. Those who have received the blessing of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna are really fortunate. If they can follow the children of the great Master with firm faith and steadfast devotion, they will surely attain Supreme Bliss, the goal of human life. These great followers of Sri Ramakrishna know full well the various paths of spiritual *Sadhana* suited to the time. They instruct those who go to them for spiritual help in a manner suited to their spiritual evolution. Proceed along the path into which it has been your good fortune to be led. Pray to your *Guru* with the faith of a child and he will certainly do all that is needful. He is the best *Guru* who, whether his physical body stands or falls, sees that every one of his disciples attains liberation. The speciality of this age is that even after the disappearance of his physical body, the *Guru* appears in flesh to his disciples to guide and bless them.

Strive and struggle ceaselessly. Shake off all doubt and plunge into your *Sadhana* that you may realise and make your own what you have learned from your *Guru*. Let not your spiritual practices be done for show, or to catch the public eye; but follow them silently and steadily, so that even your neighbours may not know of them. There may be people who may ridicule you or try to shake your faith; there may be others who by their praise and respect for you, increase your egotism. Therefore always bear in mind this great teaching of Sri Ramakrishna: "Meditate in your mind, in the forest or in a quiet corner." The meaning of this is that all *Sadhana* must be done in strict privacy, that others may not come to know of it. If you steadily practise like this even for a little time, you will find what great joy and bliss will come to you. You will be a changed man altogether. Therefore you who have renounced the world in His name, say to yourself with all firmness: "Realise Him I must, now, in this very life." Yes, let this be your supreme aim in life. You have got the blessings of a real *Guru* and you are bound to succeed. There cannot be, my child, the least doubt of it.

XXXV

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

Keep your mind always in communion with God; then all depravity of the mind will vanish. Select a room for daily worship; every morning and evening retire there and sit on your *Asanam;* then perform *Japam* and meditation and prayer regularly as long as you can. Born as a man here on this earth, the more you can devote yourself to the contemplation of God, the more fruitful will your life become; and the more attached you are to the vanities of the world, the more peaceless you will feel in mind. I pray to the Almighty that out of His endless grace He may lead you in the right path!

Know this; without worshipping God you can never have peace of mind. Therefore suspending all activities completely, spend some time every day in the worship of God, in *Japam* and meditation, and in singing His glory. True devotion and faith and knowledge are the results of long and continued practice of *Sadhana.* Many people turn to agnosticism when, after a little lukewarm attempt at *Sadhana,* they cannot realise God or attain to the bliss Divine. The reason is not far to seek. These people do not possess sincere attachment to God, so they find it difficult to persist and persevere in the path of *Sadhana.* *Sadhana* proves too arduous an undertaking for them.

Without Divine attachment and Divine love the mind becomes dry and peaceless. But the more you suffer for God's sake, the more peaceful will you become in the end. "Persist cheerfully in your attempt, my friend," said Sri Ramakrishna, "then you will succeed against all odds." So plunge headlong into *Sadhana* and persevere in it; shrink not even if your very life is hazarded.

* * * *

I am very glad to learn that you have been carrying on your practices with great earnestness and regularity. If this state of things is continued for a couple of years without break, I assure you, my friend, your effort will not go unrewarded. Let me also remind you that, as your constitution is weak, you need not at this stage practise for long at a stretch; rather proceed slowly and steadily.

* * * *

I propose to start on a pilgrimage to Kashi (Benares) and some other holy places early in June next and to spend three or four months visiting these places and also in practising *Sadhana;* but the fruition rests with Him, the Lord.

It is indeed difficult to have any thought of God within the human heart without the fire of *Vairagyam* (renunciation). It is my settled conviction that the more a man possesses this fire in him, the greater is the peace he enjoys. A true and living representation of *Viveka* (discrimination) and *Vairagyam* we saw in Sri Ramakrishna, the Master. It is only with the progress of time that we know Him more and more. We read of *Viveka* and *Vairagyam* in Scriptures, but we saw them personified in Him. It was our misfortune that sitting at the feet of such a unique personality, the embodiment of *Viveka* and *Vairagyam,* we could not make them our own.

* * * *

You want to go to Kashi for *Sadhana;* well, I permit you wholeheartedly. But one thing,—please do not forget to draw me there, that I may also live in the holy land with you. Oh, the sanctity of Kashi, the greatest and holiest of all places for *Sadhana!* Who is not tempted to go to this sacred place and live there? Whoever comes to me and seeks my counsel regarding a suitable place to carry on *Sadhana,* I at once suggest to him the sacred name of Kashi. I tell him to go there and live in continuous prayer and meditation. Whenever I am reminded of this holiest of holy places, I wish I could go straight there, throwing aside all engagements; I find no joy in anything else. It is my strong desire to live the last days of my life in Kashi and I am certain if you only attract me, my desire will be surely fulfilled. And remember, the noblest object of living in this blessed city of Kashi is well attained only when a man can lose himself entirely in the intoxication of love Divine, living in a lonely retreat quite undisturbed.

XXXVI

STRAY COUNSELS

1. You must not divulge the secret of your *Sadhana* to all.

2. There is nothing without, everything is within. The music without is trivial compared with the music within. Oh, the charm of it, the sweetness! Singing at the Panchavati, Sri Ramakrishna heard the music of the Vina within.

3. God should be imagined as vast and infinite. To bring this idea of vastness within, one should see the Himalayas or the ocean, or gaze at the sky.

4. True character cannot be formed unless a man becomes God-fearing, *i.e.,* unless he believes in God, in the life hereafter, and in such principles.

5. To conquer lust or control the mind by studying books is a task as impossible as walking on air.

6. The water of the Ganges is verily the holiest of all waters; it fulfils one's desire and is a help

to realising the *Ishtam*. Sri Ramakrishna has said: "The water of the Ganges, the holy *Prasadam* of Jagannath (at Puri), and the sacred dust of Vrindavan are verily Brahman in reality."

7. So long as Mother Kundalini moves in a downward direction, the mind of man runs after things relating to the phallus, the anus and the navel. But as She rises up, the mind also rises; it then moves toward things spiritual.

8. With the growth of *Sattwa* in man, he feels eager to behold the vision of God; he then delights in singing His glory and meditating upon Him more and more.

9. The food of funeral ceremonies should not be taken; it is harmful.

10. While coming down from Mughal Sarai in a motor car through the vast open fields, the scenery could not give me as much joy as did this holy land of Benares, when I crossed the bridge and entered its bounds. It was a joy unspeakable! Oh, the glory and the sweetness Divine of this land, the blessed abode of Shiva! Lord Shiva Himself

is the supreme Teacher. In this hallowed land, on the one hand Mother Annapurna supplies man with his physical wants; and on the other, Lord Viswanath ministers spiritually unto him. During our Master's visit to this holy land, a divine form exquisitely luminous and with beard on the chin appeared before Him and showed to Him everything worth seeing. The Master's body was all the while lying unconscious. This holy guide was none other than Kala Bhairava (the guardian angel of the city of Shiva).

11. What bold and prophetic words are these uttered by Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda)! "Whoever will go and try to imitate me in that land (America) will become bound; he will surely be ensnared!" A great man is born, not made! In India who has earned a greater name and greater fame than Swamiji? When he left America, he left also all his costly robes there; and on reaching India he at once took to his old habit—"Hath, Hath" (the habit of a barefooted monk trotting). Barefooted he would go to Calcutta and come back,

and like an ordinary man in the public road, he would purchase Chanachur (a mixture of fried peas, grams and nuts,—a very delicious preparation for children in particular). Sometimes we gave him a pair of shoes to wear and he would accept them. What tremendous fame and honour he earned, but still more tremendous was the power he possessed to digest this honour and glory. Reaching India, like an insignificant man, he roamed about. The least trace of corruption could not soil his mind! That is why it is said, a great man is born, not made.

12. Like the Buddha one should be bold. Behold, what a mighty renunciation he made! To realise God he gave up all his royal comforts without a thought. What a severe course of discipline he underwent! When, in spite of all, he could not realise God, he took his bath in the sacred Nirajana (a rivulet at Buddha Gaya), sat for the last time with this resolve: "Let this body go; but until I have attained illumination, I will not rise." And the illumination came!